This guide is intended to help readers reflect on the purpose, perspective, and factual detail of the book *Diplomacy* and consider how it might enhance their own understanding of diplomacy and statecraft.

**Prep Work:**
a. Read the whole book but, in particular, be prepared to discuss the following chapters:
   - Chapter 1 – The New World Order – pps. 17-28
   - Chapter 2 – The Hinge: Theodore Roosevelt or Woodrow Wilson, pps. 29-56
   - Chapter 4 – The Concert of Europe: Great Britain, Austria, and Russia
   - Chapter 6 – Realpolitik Turns On Itself
   - Chapter 12 – The End of Illusion: Hitler and the Destruction of Versailles
   - Chapter 15 – America Re-enters the Arena: Franklin Delano Roosevelt
   - Chapter 26 – Vietnam: On the Road to Despair: Kennedy and Johnson
   - Chapter 28 – Foreign policy as Geopolitics: Nixon's Triangular Diplomacy
   - Chapter 30 – The End of the Cold War: Reagan and Gorbachev
   - Chapter 31 – The New World Order Revisited

b. Optional: To get a sense of Dr. Kissinger, watch the CSPAN video of his remarks at the National Press Club when the book was published in 1994. Watch the first twenty minutes as he describes the purpose of his book; you can skip the rest of the video, which is devoted to Q&A.

   - [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=98RxLXATfGk](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=98RxLXATfGk)

**Discussion Questions:** The suggested discussion questions below are only a fraction of what might be parsed from *Diplomacy*, given that it covers more than two centuries of American and European history and touches on virtually all of the theoretical aspects of international relations.

1. **Key Take-Away:** Kissinger concludes that two contradictory impulses have always composed American diplomacy. (p.18)

   Q: In Kissinger's view, what are America's contradictory impulses toward foreign policy?

   One is idealism or moralism, typified by Woodrow Wilson. The other is realism, typified by Theodore Roosevelt. Kissinger portrays Wilson as the embodiment of the ideal of American exceptionalism. Roosevelt had mastered the established principles of statecraft, of masterful analyses of how to further American national interest through power politics. But Wilson understood that "Americans could be moved to great deeds only through a vision that coincided
with their perception of their country as exceptional," as not operating under the principles of other nations. (pps. 43-44) One is policy based on the realities of power, largely excluding moral or ethical considerations. The other, which emerges from the American belief that it is unique or exceptional in its moral nature, privileges idealism and values in the policy making. Kissinger comes down on the side of "Realpolitik" as the most useful.

2. Key Take-Away: While supporting Realpolitik, Kissinger recognizes that values have a role in the formulation of policy.

Q: What role should values play in the formulation of policy?

Q: Converging national interests are often cited as solid grounds for agreement or alliances (e.g. the Soviet-American WWII alliance to defeat Hitler). Was it predictable that the alliance would founder after the common enemy was defeated? Did the lack of shared values doom the alliance?

He notes that the great European peace forged at Vienna in 1815 – a process Kissinger masterfully examined in his first book *A World Restored: A World Restored: Metternich, Castlereagh and the Problems of Peace 1812-1822* (1957) – was based on a "sense of shared values. There was not only a physical equilibrium but a moral one." (p.79)

3. Key Take-Away: Realpolitik is not synonymous with Realism.

Q: What is the difference between Realpolitik and Realism?

Some scholars describe the international relations theory of Realism as essentially the same as Realpolitik. Others, including the writer of this discussion guide, see them as related but not identical. Realism is a theory that attempts to describe how the international system of nation-states has evolved over decades and centuries. The international system is anarchical; each nation is out for itself. Realism says that states are identical in many respects. They are sovereign and report to no higher authority. They have borders within which the state exercises administrative functions. States have identical motivation: they seek more security and more material power, defined as economic and military strength. However, states differ in their strength. Some have more economic and military power, strategic resources, and population, as well as better geographic locations. The relative power differences among states are crucial to explaining their behavior. For example, in their quest for more power, stronger states can be more aggressive than weaker states, which might band together to oppose a strong state.

Realpolitik, on the other hand, is not a theory but a diplomatic craft: the wise statesman's case-by-case construction of "foreign policy based on calculations of power and the national interest." (p.137) Realism is a theory, not a method of making policy. Realpolitik is the reverse.

4. Key Take-Away: American exceptionalism is more than the conviction that America is exceptional, unique among nations in its moral and ethical nature. Exceptionalism implies that America should behave exceptionally in its dealings with the world.
Q: According to Kissinger, what have been the consequences of foreign policy founded on exceptionalism?
Q: Do you agree that exceptionalism (as Kissinger describes it) can lead to over-stretch or under-reach? Is America unique or exceptional in its values? How far should we go in trying to foster those values abroad? How might foreign countries react?

At times, Kissinger notes, exceptionalism undergirded isolationism, or a distancing from a corrupt and valueless world. At other times, exceptionalism impelled U.S. interventions to spread American ideals and democratic values. Kissinger warns that the impulse to intervene everywhere to fulfill American ideals can lead to over-stretch. The other exceptionalist alternative – isolationism – will lead to under-reach in a world that needs American leadership. Statesmen must balance idealistic exceptionalism and the realities of power.

Kissinger says the Wilsonian ideal of self-determination hindered an early resistance to Hitler. Unifying German-speaking peoples in the Sudetenland and Austria could be justified by self-determination. But when Hitler occupied the rest of Czechoslovakia, bringing non-Germans into the Reich, it confirmed Hitler as an aggressor. After Germany took Czechoslovakia, no more western concessions were possible. Indeed, German actions were resisted even more strongly now that they were clearly violations of Wilsonian idealism. (p.317)

5. Key Take-Away: Analysis vice instinct makes for good policy formulation.

Q: Why are leaders better served by analysis rather than instinct?

"All great leaders walk alone. Their singularity springs from their ability to discern challenges that are not yet apparent to their contemporaries. … No president, with the possible exception of Abraham Lincoln, has made a more decisive difference in American history." (pps.369-70) Kissinger frowns on leaders, like Hitler, who "operated on instinct rather than analysis." (p.289) But (on p. 371) he also says that FDR, whom he claims had a more decisive difference in American foreign relations than any president than Lincoln, "governed more often by instinct than by analysis." How are the two men different? Why was Hitler bad and FDR good? Some instincts are better than others, perhaps. But more important were FDR's great strengths: a big heart, superb political skills, an imagination, and a superb sense of the forces at work in the time in which he lived. (p.371) Another key difference is that Hitler operated without institutional or political constraints to his instinct, whereas FDR worked within the American democratic system and the Anglo-American alliance, not to mention interacting with other influential players such as Churchill, Marshall, and Brooke.

6. Key Take-Away: After intervening in Europe in 1917, America retreated from such an activist, Wilsonian policy.

Q: What policy did America follow between the world wars, and why?

Kissinger describes how, after the "Great Departure" of intervention in WWI, America returned to ambivalence about overseas commitments. The U.S. reiterated "the uniqueness of America's mission as the exemplar of democracy, the moral superiority of democratic foreign policy, the
importance of open diplomacy, and the replacement of the balance of power by international consensus…” as expressed in the League of Nations, the Washington Conference of 1921-22, and other international accords of the 1920’s. (pps.371-72)

A major episode was the Washington Conference of 1921-22, which produced three important treaties. The Five Power Treaty set capital ship ratios at 10 for Britain, 10 for the U.S., 6 for Japan and 1.75 for France and Italy. The Four Power Treaty pledged Britain, Japan, the U.S. and France to consult, rather than act unilaterally, in any crisis. The Nine Power Treaty bound the major powers to respect the Open Door principles of equal access to China and no seizure of Chinese territory. Hughes made it clear that the treaties did not include automatic enforcement provisions. The treaties were pledges – professions of principle and intent. If the treaties were violated, the United States would decide each case as it arose. According to Kissinger, the 1973 Vietnam Peace agreement was treated similarly, with the Congress rejecting any automatic right of enforcement. That meant "agreements with America would reflect Washington's mood of the moment; whatever consequences grew out of them would likewise depend on Washington's mood at some other moment—an attitude not very likely to engender confidence in America's commitments." (pps.373-74)

True enough, but elsewhere Kissinger says the best and most lasting agreements are those that are based on enduring national interests, in which the signatories' interests benefit from adhering to the agreements. If immediate violations occur, one wonders if the agreement was founded on truly enduring interests. And national interests evolve. Governments might no longer see fidelity to an agreement as furthering the national interest, and so the agreements are dissolved or violated. In that sense, agreements are, at least to some degree, prisoners of "the moment."

7. Key Take-Away: Kissinger thinks Vietnam was an over-stretch.

Q: Why does Kissinger think Vietnam was an over-stretch?

"In the cauldron of Vietnam, America was to learn that there are limits to even the most sacrosanct beliefs, and was forced to come to terms with the gap … between power and principle." (p.658)

"The nightmare of Vietnam was … why [America intervened] without a more careful assessment of the likely costs and potential outcomes. A nation should not send half a million of its young to a distant continent or stake its international standing and domestic cohesion unless its leaders can describe their political goals and offer a realistic strategy for achieving them—as President [H.W.]Bush did later in the Gulf War. Washington should have asked itself two basic questions: Was it possible to establish democracy and achieve military victory more or less simultaneously? And even more crucial, will the benefits justify the costs?" (p.659)

8. Key Take-Away: Realpolitik is a good policy for the 21st century.

Q – Is Realpolitik a good policy in the 21st century? Should (or could) we fuse Realpolitik with our ideas and values? How?
Q – Realpolitik recognizes the limits of power. It assumes that some interventions better advance national interests at lower costs of blood and treasure than other interventions. It suggests that we behave not according to a great overarching principle but to a case by case calculation of bang for the buck. Do you agree? Does Realpolitik lead to accusations of inconsistency, if, for example, we intervene in Libya but not in Syria, in Bosnia in the 1990’s but not in Rwanda? Or is this inconsistency a natural and desirable consequence of case by case analysis?

"Nixon was the first president since Theodore Roosevelt to conduct American foreign policy largely in the name of the national interest. The drawback of this approach was its dearth of emotional resonance among the American people. Though Nixon frequently spoke of a structure of peace, structures are instruments that do not themselves evoke commitments in the hearts and minds of a society—especially one imbued with American's tradition of exceptionalism." (p.731)

"Like Woodrow Wilson, Reagan understood that the American people, having marched throughout their history to the drumbeat of exceptionalism, would find their ultimate inspiration in historic ideals, not in geopolitical analysis. In this sense, Nixon was to Reagan as Theodore Roosevelt had been to Woodrow Wilson. Like Roosevelt, Nixon had a far better understanding of the workings of international relations; like Wilson, Reagan had a much surer grasp of the workings of the American soul." (p.767)

9: Key Take-Away: In the final chapter, Kissinger reviews the foreign policy challenges of 1994 and his suggestions for managing them. His solutions are chiefly the lessons imparted earlier in the book.

Q: Why is Realpolitik the most useful policy?
Q – How can we determine the degree to which values are shared between the U.S. and a foreign country? What are the most important values to share? Do shared values lead to shared national interests?
Q: Kissinger does not spend much time – nor did he have enough space, even in a comparatively long book – discussing broad grassroots trends and developments that, along with the efforts of top policymakers, shaped diplomacy. The increasing democratization of the U.S., the changing role of women, the rise of national media with its intense coverage of leaders, the increasingly difficult task, for policymakers, of keeping their plans secret, all affect policy formulation and execution. Do we need to look harder at these topics as well?

Kissinger notes: "Given the complexity of the new international system, can Wilsonian concepts like "enlarging democracy" serve as principal guides to American foreign policy and as replacement for the Cold War strategy of containment? Clearly, these concepts have been neither an unqualified success nor an unqualified failure. Some of the finest acts of twentieth century diplomacy had their roots in the idealism of Woodrow Wilson: the Marshall Plan, the brave commitment to containing communism, defense of the freedom of Western Europe, and even the ill-fated League of Nations and its later incarnation, the United Nations. At the same time, Wilsonian idealism has produced a plethora of problems. … Wilson's appeal to America to go forth in the pursuit of democracy produced acts of great creativity. It also led it to such disastrous crusades as Vietnam." (pps.808-09)
America must make a clear definition of the national interest an essential component of future foreign policy. "The international system which lasted the longest without a major war was the one following the Congress of Vienna. It combined legitimacy and equilibrium, shared values, and balance-of-power diplomacy." (p.811)

"The precise balance between the moral and the strategic elements of American foreign policy cannot be prescribed in the abstract. But the beginning of wisdom consists of recognizing that a balance must be struck. However powerful America is, no country has the capacity to impose all its preferences on the rest of mankind; priorities must be established."

(p.812)

*Diplomacy* Discussion Key Take-Aways:

1. Kissinger concludes that two contradictory impulses have always composed American diplomacy.
2. While supporting *Realpolitik*, Kissinger recognizes that values have a role in the formulation of policy.
3. *Realpolitik* is not synonymous with Realism.
4. Kissinger asserts that American exceptionalism is more than the conviction that America is exceptional, unique among nations in its moral and ethical nature. Exceptionalism implies that America should behave exceptionally in its dealings with the world.
5. Analysis vice instinct makes for good policy formulation.
6. After intervening in Europe in 1917, America retreated from such an activist, Wilsonian policy.
7. Kissinger thinks Vietnam was an over-stretch.
8. *Realpolitik* is a good policy for the 21st century.
9. In the final chapter, Kissinger reviews the foreign policy challenges of 1994 and his suggestions for managing them. His solutions are chiefly the lessons imparted earlier in the book.

To the Discussion Leader:

This guide is intended to help Marines think about and synthesize ideas from the book *Diplomacy*. All answers or responses during discussion should be embraced as relevant, and open for further discussion. To the guide leader: There is no single right answer.

Encourage Marines to read, from this book and other books. Encourage them to think and challenge and debate, and arrive at a common understanding. Encourage them to consider the ideas of others (authors and peers) and to push themselves intellectually.

Avoid leading the discussion group to a particular interpretation. Support continuous conversation. This guide does NOT support a lecture with mile-deep detail on every possible issue and scenario in the book *Diplomacy*.

The point of this guide is to help the readers synthesize the purpose, perspective, wisdom – “goodness” – of the book with their own perspectives on warfighting, and come out of this session or sessions of small group PME with a better sense of history, identity, and purpose.