

# HENRY KISSINGER'S APPROACH TO FOREIGN POLICY

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"Henry Kissinger is without question the most brilliant American polemicist in the general area of foreign and national policy. He possesses an unusual ability to seize particular positions and publicize them in a compelling manner. . . ." So wrote Professor Morton Kaplan, a leading champion of a "scientific" approach to the study of international politics, in a review of the "traditionalist" Kissinger's *The Necessity for Choice: Prospects of American Foreign Policy* (1960). President Nixon's choice of Kissinger as his advisor on National Security Affairs marks the perpetuation of academics in that role, McGeorge Bundy of Harvard and Walt W. Rostow of M.I.T. having served as predecessors under Presidents Kennedy and Johnson. Nixon's selection of Kissinger, an "Establishment" figure who had long served as New York Governor Rockefeller's foreign policy advisor, may have surprised those who have viewed Nixon as out of the "mainstream" of American politics and connections, and doubtless upset those observers who believe—unlike Nixon and Kissinger—that the cold war is over.

While Kissinger rightly dislikes simplistic labels, his general approach to American foreign policy can be defined by study of his four books and numerous articles. In addition to being a "traditionalist" and not a "scientist," Kissinger is more power and Western than development and Third World in his orientation, although he is neither unaware of the dilemmas of security in the nuclear age nor of the need for assistance to and concern with the politics of the developing nations.

With regard to the question of domestic vs. foreign policy priorities which has been agitating the country since the Vietnam and racial conflicts erupted, Kissinger wrote in *The Necessity for Choice*: "We do not have the choice between improving ourselves and dealing with the menaces to our security." Both tasks must be undertaken, in Kissinger's view, now at the end as well as at the beginning of this decade. But Kissinger is well aware that, as he put it in his recent essay, "Central Issues of American Foreign Policy" (published in the Brookings Institution volume *Agenda for the Nation*), "one of the legacies of the war in Vietnam will be a strong American reluctance to risk overseas involvements" which might result in simi-

lar entanglements. Nevertheless, Kissinger wrote in "The Vietnam Negotiations" (*Foreign Affairs*, January 1969), "However we got into Vietnam, whatever the judgment of our actions, ending the war honorably [i.e., without an immediate Communist victory there<sup>o</sup>] is essential for the peace of the world. Any other solution may unloose forces that would complicate prospects of international order."

In *Time's* journalese, Kissinger ". . . has not fallen into either of the two great temptations that have beset American foreign policy in the past—excessive idealism and excessive pragmatism." He is neither Utopian nor Realist, neither "Hawk" nor "Dove," as well as neither idealist nor pragmatist. He believes that the United States needs to develop a sound "conceptual" approach to foreign affairs in order to deal effectively with crises of the moment, as well as with "underlying problems." It should be of interest to readers of this journal to note that Kissinger has not dealt explicitly in his writings with the relation of religion and moral concepts to problems of foreign policy, though needless to say this does not mean that he is morally insensitive. It is clear that Kissinger subscribes to Max Weber's and Raymond Aron's preference for the "morality of responsibility" as opposed to the "morality of conviction." That is to say, the statesman and thinker should take into account the results likely to occur if one or another course of action is chosen in any given situation. It is not sufficient to "take a stand" on moral principles without regard to the likely effects on one's country and on mankind of such a stance. In short, statesmen and thinkers have to weigh the pros and cons of realistic options in any given situation, and decide in terms of the lesser evil at least as often as on the basis of the positive good hopefully anticipated from the best of available alternatives.

Kissinger's current thinking can be found in the essay in *Agenda for the Nation* referred to above. What follows is an attempt to spell out and comment

<sup>o</sup>My enclosure. Kissinger of course does not want a victory for North Vietnam and the N.L.F. in the South. But his article suggests that America's commitment could be met and still result in an ultimate Communist victory there.

upon some of his ideas, taking account of his other writings as well. The essay concentrates on "structural and conceptual problems" of American foreign policy (the seven other essays on foreign affairs in the Brookings volume deal with specific policy issues). Kissinger writes, "the revolutionary character of our age can be summed up in three general statements: (a) the number of participants in the international order has increased and their nature has altered; (b) their technical ability to affect each other has vastly grown; (c) the scope of their purposes has expanded." He notes that historically whenever the participants have changed, a "period of profound dislocation" has been inevitable. And since the second world war several scores of new nations have entered on the world stage. Technology and communications enable nations to reach further than ever before, as seen most dramatically of course in the development of nuclear weapons and intercontinental delivery vehicles. Moreover, the ideological conflicts of the twentieth century compound these instabilities, cutting across national lines. While the world has become multipolar politically, it remains essentially bipolar militarily, with the U.S. and the USSR dominating the latter arena. Whereas "The guardians of the equilibrium (in world politics) of the nineteenth century were prepared to respond to change with counter-adjustment; the policy-makers of the superpowers in the second half of the twentieth century have much less confidence in the ability of the equilibrium to right itself after each disturbance." Military bipolarity and ideological conflict mean both America and Russia view a gain for the other as a loss for themselves.

At this point Kissinger juxtaposes two sentences which seemingly contradict each other. "Equilibrium is difficult to achieve among states widely divergent in values, goals, expectations, and previous experience. The greatest need of the contemporary international system is an agreed concept of order." He then writes a little further on, "Political multipolarity makes it impossible to impose an American design. Our deepest challenge will be to evoke the creativity of a pluralistic world, to base order on political multipolarity even though overwhelming military strength will remain with the two superpowers." While properly critical of American "Grand Designs" which neglect the truth of D. W. Brogan's famous concept of "The Illusion of American Omnipotence," Kissinger seems to think that it should be possible to get agreement among the diverse nations on the world stage regarding permissible aims and methods of foreign policy. Kissin-

ger's doctoral thesis, published subsequently as *A World Restored*, described the Congress of Vienna and its role in establishing the "Concert of Great Powers" which helped foster the relative tranquility of the century from 1815-1914. He seems to seek a comparable international arrangement in the present era which will restore equilibrium and "order," for which Kissinger has a Germanic and conservative fondness.

Despite the U.S. and Soviet interest in avoiding a nuclear war, it is hard to see how such an agreed system can be achieved given the gulf in their "self-evident truths" and their clashing interests, particularly in Europe, Asia, and the Middle East. Moreover, the Third World is undergoing a gigantic upheaval during which international violence and internal instability seem almost inevitable throughout the remaining decades of the century. All this is not to say that the Nixon Administration should not try to reach agreements with Russia on both arms control and political disputes, or that the superpowers should not try to dampen conflicts in Europe and the Third World which could escalate and produce American and Russian confrontations. It is simply to suggest that Kissinger's longing for equilibrium and order is likely to remain that rather than a reality, given the national, racial and other rivalries and conflicts of ideology and interest which continue to plague our time. Marshall Shulman thinks several decades may be required before the Soviet Union can be expected to adopt a "normal" interest-oriented approach. This perspective seems advisable, although both those who suffer from nightmares of nuclear holocaust and the "Now Generation" will doubtless disagree, and one can hope for an earlier shift.

Because the subject is so complex, Kissinger's call for a new look at military strategy and arms control approaches and their relation both to each other and to political settlements with the Soviet Union will only be noted here. Suffice it to say his awareness of the insecurity of both the superpowers given their nuclear capabilities, and his understanding of the haziness of both "balance of power" and nuclear "superiority" concepts should be reassuring to those tempted to label him a "Hawk" or proponent of pure "power politics." He has long since altered the views expressed in *Nuclear Weapons and Foreign Policy*. In the section of the essay subtitled "Political Multipolarity: The Changed Nature of Alliances," Kissinger's West European and NATO orientation, and his skepticism regarding alliances such as SEATO and CENTO are revealed. On the other hand, contrary to his advocacy

in *The Troubled Partnership* of a more formalized relationship between America and Western Europe, and his insistence in the Brookings' essay that "there is no alternative to European unity either for the United States or for Europe," Kissinger concedes in his essay that, "In the next decade the architectonic approach to Atlantic policy will no longer be possible." That is, such schemes as that of President Kennedy for an "Atlantic Partnership" between America and Canada on the one hand, and Western Europe on the other, awaits West European resolution of the question of which road to take to unity, if indeed any such road is taken in the foreseeable future. As for the American stake in Asia, Kissinger seems aware of the need for a U.S. counterweight to China pending a more vigorous Japanese role. Perhaps he slights the necessity of an American security effort in other areas of the globe, especially in Latin America. One can say this without subscribing to the notion that this nation should automatically intervene whenever a Communist threat appears in the Third World, and without endorsing the "global policeman" concept which Kennedy and Johnson allegedly embraced.

As for American diplomatic and economic relations with developing nations, Kissinger stresses the problems of "political legitimacy" in such countries, in other words, of the prospect for difficulty in establishing viable and well-ordered governments in the Third World. This seems commonplace. Kissinger is aware that American and Western aid and trade will not automatically produce economic development, as well as that the latter will not necessarily produce political institutions and ideals compatible with Western notions and practices of democracy. On the other hand, as Max Millikan suggests in his essay in the Brookings' volume on "The United States and Low-Income Countries," in the absence of substantial American and Western aid and favorable trade measures the prospects for both economic and political development compatible with a more ordered world will be even gloomier. Kissinger gives no evidence of the deep concern with the Third World found in liberal and radical quarters in America, and is clearly much more concerned with problems of relations with the Soviet Union and with Western Europe.

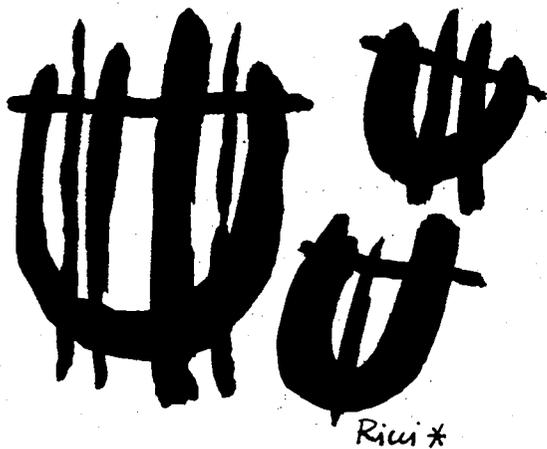
Kissinger's discussion of the "The Problem of Soviet Intentions" reiterates his oft-repeated view that too many in America and the West are easily deceived by apparent shifts in the "atmosphere" of Western-Soviet relations. In his words, "If we are not to be doomed to repeat the past, it may be well to learn some of its lessons: We should not again confuse a change

of tone with a change of heart. We should not pose false inconsistencies between allied unity and détente; indeed, a true relaxation of tensions presupposes Western unity." President Nixon's trip to Western Europe prior to holding talks with the Soviet Union on arms control and perhaps on political issues is in accord with Kissinger's long expressed view that such is the proper order of priorities. While reassuring to both Bonn and NATO officials and some others in the West, this approach will be criticized by those who place détente and arms control ahead of greater cohesion in the West. Kissinger's skepticism seems well grounded on the record of past and present Soviet performance, even if one thinks that both Western unity and détente with Russia can be pursued simultaneously—which may be desirable, but perhaps is not feasible, given the difficulties in "bridge-building." In any event, Kissinger clearly does not agree with those who think the cold war is over and it's just that neither the American nor the Russian "Establishments" believe they can afford to admit it and act accordingly. On the other hand, it is hard to square Kissinger's desire for equilibrium and order with his realism about Soviet intentions.

The last section of Kissinger's essay, subtitled "An Inquiry into the American National Interest," is one of the most interesting and suggestive. He says, "we must recognize the existence of profound structural problems that are to a considerable extent independent of the intentions of the principal antagonists and that cannot be solved merely by good will." These structural problems, noted above, are not susceptible to resolution through such youthful slogans as, "All you need is love, Baby." (Not a quote from Kissinger.) We must, he goes on, "undertake an inquiry, from which we have historically shied away, into the essence of our national interest and into the premises of our foreign policy." This is hard to square with the Great Debate which has gone on among American students and practitioners of foreign policy for the last two decades, stemming from George Kennan's effort in *American Diplomacy: 1900-1950*, the writings of Hans Morgenthau, and the reaction to these two realists by utopian and non-utopian thinkers and actors. But Kissinger does pose two relevant and very important questions regarding the American national interest: "What is it in our interest to prevent? What should we seek to accomplish?"

Kissinger believes that past American Administrations have been befogged by the notion "that we must resist aggression anywhere it occurs since peace is indivisible. . . . This leads to an undifferentiated

globalism and confusion about our purposes. The abstract concept of aggression causes us to multiply our commitments. . . . A new American Administration confronts the challenge of relating our commitments to our purposes and our obligations to our purposes." He also writes, "No country can act wisely in every part of the globe at every moment in time." This all sounds very well, but overlooks the fact that while there have been over 400 cases of internal upheaval and international violence in the last two decades, the United States obviously did not become involved in most of them. Perhaps Kissinger, like other critics, confuses the at times universalist rhetoric of postwar Administrations with their actual performance. Even if one thinks we have on occasion "rushed in where Angels feared to tread," American has not in fact been playing "global policeman." Fortunately, Washington hasn't had to try to be wise everywhere simultaneously. It is moreover a truism to say the United States should relate its commitments to its power and purposes. The difficulty lies, as it does with identifying and implementing the "national interest," in determining what our purposes are in any given situation.



Having said this, one can still agree with Kissinger when he writes, "Enthusiasm, belief in progress, and the invincible conviction that American remedies can work everywhere must give way to an understanding of historical trends . . . a clearer understanding of America's interests and of the requirements of equilibrium can give perspective to our idealism and lead to humane and moderate objectives. . . ." One can also appreciate Kissinger's admonition regarding the oscillation of the American mood "between being ashamed of power and expecting too much of it. . . . The danger of a rejection of power is that it may re-

sult in a nihilistic perfectionism which disdains the gradual and seeks to destroy what does not conform to its notion of utopia. The danger of an over-concern with force is that policy makers may respond to clamor by a series of spasmodic gestures and stylistic maneuvers and then recoil before their implications." (Vietnam?). All these maxims are valuable guides to policy makers, even if they cannot automatically be translated into decisions in concrete situations. Kissinger rightly suggests a moderate attitude between idealism and pragmatism.

After saying America "requires a new burst of creativity" and must regain "a sense of direction," Kissinger writes, "The best and most prideful expressions of American purposes in the world have been those in which we acted in concert with others. . . . Regional groupings supported by the United States will have to take over major responsibility for their immediate areas, with the United States being more concerned with the overall framework of order than with the management of every regional enterprise." One can subscribe to this as a long run notion, but it seems that Charles Yost was closer to the truth when he said in "World Order and American Responsibility" (*Foreign Affairs*, October, 1968), "Allies of the United States are likely to be unwilling or unable during this period (1970's) to assume significant peacekeeping responsibilities outside of their own region. Only in Europe and Latin America will such allies be able to assume a major role in peacekeeping even inside their own region." Yost also wrote that, whatever the outcome of American-Soviet arms and political discussions, "the United States will continue nevertheless to be saddled during this decade (1970's) with substantial unilateral responsibilities arising from previous commitments or from continuing interests, for the maintenance of international security." It is easier to say the United States is overcommitted than it is to say exactly where America should reduce its commitments, given the unwillingness or inability of Western Europe and Japan to significantly increase their defense and foreign aid and trade roles in the foreseeable future.

Kissinger concludes his essay: America "must recognize that, in the field of foreign policy, we will never be able to contribute to building a stable and creative world order unless we first form some conception of it." Dean Rusk always said that the kind of world Americans seek is found in the Preamble of the United Nations Charter. That was more specific and concrete than Kissinger's invocation, however utopian and largely irrelevant to decision-making in the here

# PERPETUAL CRISIS

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and now. Kissinger fails to spell out a conception of the sort of world America should seek, beyond calling for equilibrium, order, stability and peaceful change, none of which are likely to be realistic goals in the 1970's. Walt Rostow, Kissinger's immediate predecessor, is generally considered more utopian than Kissinger. But he had a better perspective on possibilities in the remaining decades of the twentieth century when he concluded his *The United States in the World Arena* (1960), "The United States, child of the Enlightenment, favored adolescent of the nineteenth century, powerful but erratic youth of the first half of the twentieth, must now confirm its maturity by acting from the present forward to see the values of the Enlightenment—or their equivalents in non-Western cultures—survive and dominate in the twenty-first." If this is to be done, then one can try to answer Kissinger's two questions, "What is it in our interest to prevent? What should we seek to accomplish?" America has little choice but to continue to try to forestall Communist expansion (recognizing there is no "monolithic communism" today) as well as to foster both West European and Third World political and economic strength and cohesion and security burden sharing.

President Nixon, as was President Kennedy, is primarily interested in foreign rather than in domestic policy. At a time when so many want priority to be given to our pressing domestic problems, this bent alienates various critics. But the problems of the world will not disappear and permit such a concentration of American energies. We must mature, i.e., get over our historic single-track mindedness, and recognize that we have no choice between improving ourselves and dealing with menaces to our security and with the problems of the Third World. One could wish that Nixon and Kissinger were more perceptive and responsive to the legitimate demands of American blacks and the Third World alike. This lack could prove to be the Achilles' heel of the Nixon Administration.

Obviously America's domestic performance affects its world standing. Nixon and Kissinger are both more at home in Europe than in the non-Western parts of the globe. They are also squares. Nevertheless, Nixon could have done far worse than elect Henry Kissinger as his Advisor on National Security Affairs. For Kissinger is one of the most balanced and brilliant students as well as polemicists in the general area of foreign policy. And he has demonstrated a capacity to grow. He may be in part a "realist," but at least he is a flexible one.

The British Minister of Defense, Denis Healy, has informed us that within minutes of the outbreak of hostilities every Soviet fleet unit in the Mediterranean would be sunk. Let us hope that he has supplied us with a long-overdue corrective to the near-hysteria evident in the press about the Soviet naval presence in the area.

Presumably by citing the destruction of the Soviet fleet "within minutes" Mr. Healy is making reference to nuclear weapons—a most implausible scenario. But even in a limited encounter, held short of a nuclear exchange, it is hard to believe that the Soviet fleet would fare well in combat.

Where is the Soviet naval tradition? The last time a Russian fleet sailed to battle it was to destruction at the tragicomedy of Tsushima. The Soviets are grotesquely overmatched by the American Sixth fleet; and they are not even a match for the British and French units singly available to oppose them. The fleet, for one thing, has no air cover: the Soviets have developed helicopter assault carriers, but these could not hope to dominate a beachhead—even against a determined Israeli airforce.

But merely to talk in such terms comes close to the absurd. Once again we have seen in action the American penchant for exaggerated response, the inability to view any new development with skepticism and reserve. This is partly national character. Americans, it seems, thrive on excitement. Partly too it is something a little less general: the hunger of the press for a daily sensation and the less-than-candid military appreciations of American admirals who know that the money lies in the exaggerated response.

We need to understand that we pay a price for rhetoric. Not only does it hinder the process of factual analysis that precedes the definition of a wise foreign policy; it operates as a kind of self-fulfilling prophecy, sometimes calling into existence the very thing it purports to fear.

The real trouble with the rhetoric about the new Soviet Mediterranean venture is that it has pretty well given the Soviets what they want—an effective

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