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# Ramparts®

Henry Kissinger: The First Proconsul of the American Empire



*he never came to terms with the new age it was not because he failed to understand its seriousness but because he disdained it."*

WITH THESE WORDS, A HARVARD thesis-writer named Henry Kissinger introduced Clemens Metternich, Austria's greatest foreign minister and a man whose diplomatic life he has sought to relive. As Richard Nixon's most influential advisor on foreign policy, Kissinger has embodied the role of the 19th century balance-of-power diplomat. He is cunning, elusive, and all-powerful in the sprawling sector of government which seeks to advise the President on national security matters. As Nixon's personal emissary to foreign dignitaries, to academia, and—as "a high White House official"—to the press, he is vague and unpredictable—yet he is the single authoritative carrier of national policy, besides the President himself.

Like the Austrian minister who became his greatest political hero, Kissinger has used his position in government as a protective cloak to conceal his larger ambitions and purposes. Far from being the detached, objective arbiter of presidential decision-making, he has become a crucial molder and supporter of Nixon's foreign policy. Instead of merely holding the bureaucracy at comfortable arm's length, he has entangled it in a web of useless projects and studies, cleverly shifting an important locus of advisory power from the Cabinet departments to his own office. And as a confidential advisor to the President, he never speaks for the record, cannot be made to testify before Congress, and is identified with presidential policy only on a semi-public level. His activity is even less subject to domestic constraints than that of Nixon himself.

Not that any of this is very surprising, however, because Kissinger has emerged from that strain of policy thinking which is fiercely anti-popular and anti-bureaucratic in its origins. Like the ministers who ruled post-Napoleonic Europe from the conference table at Vienna—and the Eastern Establishment figures who preceded him as policy-makers of a later age—Kissinger believes that legislative bodies, bureaucracies, and run-of-the-mill citizenries all lack the training and temperament that are needed in the diplomatic field. He is only slightly less moved by the academics who parade down to Washington to be with the great man and peddle their ideas. And when one sets aside popular opinion, Congress, the bureaucracy, and the academic community, there remains the President alone. The inescapable conclusion is that Henry Kissinger's only meaningful constituency is a constituency of one.

At a superficial level, the comparison with Metternich breaks down. As opposed to a finely carved figure, Kissinger is only of average height, slightly overweight, excessively plain, and somewhat stooped. Far from *beau-ideal*, he is a Jewish refugee, and he speaks with a foreign accent. Despite the image of the gay divorcé, the ruminations about his social activity seem to be grounded more in journalism than in fact.

But without being a butterfly, Kissinger is a deeper individual than the man he wrote about, and he possesses qualities which have attracted him a great deal more popularity in inner circles than his methods or policies would seem to



## The Rise of Henry Kissinger

*"He was a Rococo figure, complex, finely carved, all surface, like an intricately cut prism. His face was delicate but without depth, his conversation brilliant but without ultimate seriousness. Equally at home in the salon and in the Cabinet, he was the beau-ideal of [an] aristocracy which justified itself not by its truth but by its existence. And if*

by David Landau

warrant. He has none of the pedigreed arrogance of his predecessors, and when he likes, he exudes a personal charm and warmth that have struck immense sympathy among those who associate with him. Even those who have left his staff over policy decisions are quick to defend his intellect and his motivations. And if personality traits do not redeem bad decisions and repugnant policies, they do a great deal to make them more understandable; for at the top crust of Washington policy-making, it is the impact of decisive personalities—not that of impressive intellect—which ultimately spurs the winning recommendations and gives them decisive force. And if his reading of Metternich has taught Kissinger anything, it is that personality could ape *beau-ideal*, and that once in the seat of power, ultimate seriousness could be transformed to the diplomat's disdain.

**H**EINZ KISSINGER WAS BORN IN THE SMALL village of Fuerth, in Franconia, on May 27, 1923. His father was a professor at the gymnasium, or prep school, in Fuerth; his Jewish upbringing was marked by an early respect for scholarship. But by 1930, the Nazis had seized power in Franconia, and after eight years of social torture and humiliation, the Kissinger family was forced to abandon its home and migrate to America.

The experience was shattering to the young man of 15. He saw his parents, to whom he was deeply attached, uprooted and destroyed. He himself suffered the pangs of a refugee childhood in New York City. And it was only in the American army of occupation during World War II that he first made durable friendships and impressed people with his rare intellectual abilities.

After the war, he won a New York State scholarship and was admitted to Harvard. A thoughtful, unobtrusive man in his mid-twenties, he worked hard at his studies and slowly acquired vast confidence in his ability to do serious scholarly work. According to a colleague from his Harvard faculty days, Kissinger was once informed as the result of a clerical error that he had received a failing grade. He immediately rang up the professor involved and proclaimed, "Tell me. Is this a joke?"

A philosophy major and an attentive follower of the international scene, Kissinger had already acquired the hard-line instincts which were to fuel him in his later years. His refugee background had driven him to analyze and understand the historical process which had allowed the holocaust of the '30s to occur; America itself was too big and complicated for him to be interested in, but the world was what he knew. And if his experience had imparted to him a sense of the tragic, it also instilled in him a deep feeling that there was something one must do to prevent the next decline.

Kissinger has been heard to remark around Washington that "Nixon will save us from the hardhats"; but in his undergraduate days, the men alerting him to the danger of historical collapse were made of more sterling stuff. Kissinger read with particular concern the works of Oswald Spengler, whose dire predictions about the fall of the West had a measurable impact on the young refugee student. The historical forces shaping his early background had reeked of decadence. A colleague, Stanley Hoffman, would

remark later that Kissinger "walked in a way with the ghost of Spengler at his side."

The culmination of Kissinger's undergraduate work was a gargantuan 350-page thesis on the work of Spengler, Toynbee, and Kant. Unpretentiously titled "The Meaning of History," its only lasting impact seems to have been that it spurred the Government Department to impose a 150-page limit on the length of senior theses. But it was good enough to be graded *summa*—a rare thing in those days—and contained some fruitful insights into Kissinger's mind. In a section devoted to Spengler, he wrote that "Instinct is no guide to political conduct. Effective leadership is always forced—whatever its motives—to represent itself as the carrier of ideas, embodying purposes. All truly great achievements in history resulted from the actualization of principles, not from the clever evaluation of political conditions."

With William Yandell Elliott, a large, flamboyant Virginian who became kingpin of Harvard's Government Department, Kissinger founded and directed Harvard International Seminar, through which about 40 mid-career people from foreign countries—writers and artists as well as scholars and politicians—visited Harvard for two months of the summer every year. (It was later discovered that several of the foundations financing the Seminar were secret conduits for CIA funds, about which Kissinger claimed not to have known.) Many of these people became high-ranking government officials in their countries in the years after their attendance at the Seminar, and several—with whom Kissinger developed strong personal ties—became valued contacts for a man who was continually in the process of building his career.

It was at Elliott's recommendation that Kissinger went to work for the Council on Foreign Relations as an editor of *Foreign Affairs* and director of the Council's study on nuclear weapons. And it was through Elliott that he joined the Rockefeller Brothers Fund when that group became interested in sponsoring a series of reports on American foreign policy. Kissinger's interest then underwent a major shift from scholarship to policy. And it was his incorporation of 19th-century balance-of-power theory into the leading policy issue of the 1950s—thermonuclear relationships—where Kissinger made his mark.

The basis for Kissinger's political thinking was contained in his Ph.D. thesis, written in 1954 and later published under the title *A World Restored: The Politics of Conservatism in a Revolutionary Age*. In *A World Restored*, Kissinger argued that "stability based on an equilibrium of forces" was ultimately responsible for the relative calm of Europe in the decades preceding World War I. His fascination, however, lay clearly not with physical force as such, but rather with the clever ploys and double entendres of great power diplomacy.

The image of Europe's fate being played out in negotiations by foreign ministers who were free of popular constraints and who maintained almost unlimited autonomy with respect to their own heads of state is one that held unlimited appeal for him. And his sympathies lay not so much with the Castlereaghs who sallied forth from their island paradises when they found their interests threatened as with the statesmen who were naturally inclined to activist,

interventionist roles—men like Metternich, who defended impotent Austria and finally commanded European peace-making through the devious use of offers, deals and threats.

IT WAS WITH THIS PERSPECTIVE that Kissinger wrote *Nuclear Weapons and Foreign Policy*, which grew out of the Council on Foreign Relations studies. In it, Kissinger argued for the doctrine of “flexible response” and wound up advocating a policy of limited nuclear warfare. Not that he favored the most forceful possible use of arms; the central dilemma facing American policymakers in their dealings with the Soviet Union at that time was a choice between “massive retaliation” and no response at all. From a strategic point of view, Kissinger stated that the capability of response was vital to American security interests; from a technical viewpoint, he argued that it would be possible to choose a limit on the nuclear scale up to which it would be possible to threaten an escalation—and, if necessary, to carry out the threat.

The doctrine was rejected by most knowledgeable specialists in the arms field. The book was viciously reviewed by several influential arms specialists, a factor which reinforced Kissinger’s native insecurity and compelled him to backtrack and reverse many of the central policy recommendations. Nor were many aspects of the policy startling or innovative in themselves; the considerations surrounding the bomb and limited war had already been outlined in part by the work of Bernard Brodie, James Gavin, and Edward Teller, and the sections on diplomatic flexibility borrowed heavily from Metternich and the conferees at Vienna. The book’s real departure was its fusing of diplomatic concerns with the theory of nuclear war: the result was a potent, hard-line combination of cajolery, threat, and physical force.

The book was given a gala launching by the Council on Foreign Relations, and despite the criticism it received from experts, it was an instant public hit. On bestseller lists for 14 weeks, it made Kissinger an internationally known figure, won him a Pentagon consultantship, and attracted the attention of several influential policymakers and officials—such as Vice-President Richard M. Nixon—who later played a role in enhancing his power and prestige.

In 1957, the creation of the Harvard Center for International Affairs gave Kissinger a chance to return to teaching and scholarship with his power base intact. The CFIA was being set up by the Ford and Rockefeller Foundations as well as by McGeorge Bundy and Harvard’s leading foreign policy specialists. In a struggle for the position of associate director, Kissinger—reportedly with the prodding of the Rockefeller group—edged out Edward Katzenbach, director of the Harvard-MIT Defense Studies Program out of which the new Harvard Center grew.

Kissinger’s return to Harvard was at once triumphal and antagonizing. He now had an immense coterie of associates, contacts, and patron-saints in the outside world. His calendar was always full, and he continually angered students and colleagues by postponing their appointments as many as four or five times in a row. The unattractive twin pillars of his personality—insecurity coupled with unlimited intellectual arrogance—had been reinforced by the competitions and successes in the outside world.

BU T THERE WAS AN INGRAINED FATALISM in Kissinger—a feeling “that ultimately failure is one of the likely outcomes of any form of action,” as his close colleague Stanley Hoffman put it—which lent Kissinger’s personality a soft spot not ordinarily found in such stern, arrogant men. “He has a human quality I value very much,” a colleague at the Center for International Affairs said recently. “There’s a deep melancholy about him, and a sense that you’re dealing with a guy who has known unlimited tragedy and seen some of the bleakest parts of the human landscape.”

Soon after he returned to Harvard, he began a practice which was to recur at other times in his academic career: playing both sides of the White House political fence. Ostensibly a Rockefeller man, Kissinger readily agreed to compose position papers for a Democratic presidential candidate: Senator John F. Kennedy. He was the leading specialist on European security matters, and there was no reticence about consulting for a potential winner.

And it was as a consultant for President Kennedy that Kissinger got his first real taste of what infighting and influence games in the White House were really like. Not that he had ever been naive and amiss; it was simply that the struggle for power was more subtle and refined than he even had imagined. After advising Kennedy on the Berlin crisis—and asking the President to enter negotiations with the Russians and flex the possibilities of response, which Kennedy never did—Kissinger boorishly chose to criticize the President’s policy in the pages of *Foreign Affairs*. Even as Kennedy failed to be swayed by his advice, he travelled about the world like a man of consequence, advertising himself as *the* White House consultant on European security. Able to meet with Kennedy only from time to time, he insisted on getting regular access to him—a principle which he would deny today, because virtually no one on Kissinger’s present staff sees Nixon but Kissinger himself.

And finally there was the competition from the fast-talking, native American intellectuals of Camelot, the hard-nosed, problem-solving, pragmatically arrogant men who rejected the notion of failure and believed they could master the world with the American military machine. In this milieu, Kissinger—the advocate of negotiations and graduated threats—was very much an outcast.

Finally, at Bundy’s prodding, Kissinger was no longer used as a consultant. Embarrassed by the rebuff, he did not make it widely known that he had been dropped from Bundy’s staff. According to one observer, Kissinger’s falling out with the White House became common knowledge only after federal custodians had been seen carrying his security-classified safe out of the Center for International Affairs.

Kissinger learned well from the encounter; no longer would he be a pushy young man with advice, and never again would he conduct his infighting with a campaign on the outside. Subsequently “saved” as a White House consultant by two close friends—Carl Kaysen and Arthur Schlesinger—he became a State Department advisor on Vietnam in 1965 and later supervised secret talks with the North Vietnamese which ultimately led to the negotiations of 1968. “It was a good performance,” one colleague said of his Vietnam consultations. “His ego was under control.”

AT THE LAST STRETCH OF HIS TEACHING career, Kissinger became Nelson Rockefeller's chief foreign policy advisor during the 1968 Republican presidential campaign. During the campaign, Kissinger had made a number of highly caustic remarks about Richard Nixon; in Miami, he went so far as to declare that he doubted Nixon's fitness to be President.

Why had Kissinger placed such high hopes in Governor Rockefeller? Not because he was necessarily more "liberal," but because he was more intimately familiar with the nature of American interests—and more willing to overlook popular opinion in order to pursue them. For Rockefeller was one of that elitist milieu which was steadfast in its convictions and highly contemptuous of public will whenever it intruded on those convictions.

Kissinger's fear of Nixon stemmed from the belief that he was so deeply involved in the popular political process that he might give in to the transitory whims of public opinion rather than follow a course of action which was manifestly correct. Rockefeller was an interventionist in principle, a far more dedicated cold warrior and alliance-builder than Nixon, with his earthbound, contingent claims to popularity, could ever have been. And it was only after receiving assurances from Nixon that he would occupy a pivotal post in the new Administration—that he would have a truly significant measure of control over policy decisions—that he consented to move from one salon to another, from the Rockefeller-funded drawing rooms in Cambridge to Nixon's Washington.

*"As Metternich would say, that policy is worse than a crime. It is a mistake."*

SHORTLY AFTER PRESIDENT-ELECT NIXON chose Henry Kissinger as his national security advisor late in 1968, Kissinger phoned a number of prominent journalists and declared, "Everything I said is off the record." This request would have been an outright insult to any reporter. Such requests are always mandatory before—not after—the fact, and are appropriate only in the case of private conversations, not general pronouncements. In effect, Kissinger was trying to suppress what legitimately belonged in the public domain.

And it might have seemed surprising that, only a month after the election, Nixon would have chosen one of his most vocal antagonists as a leading policy aide. But the two men had much more in common than anyone would previously have supposed.

To begin with, Nixon turned out not to be the partisan, suspect observer of the international scene whom Kissinger had so feared. Quite the contrary—Nixon was determined to take hold of the foreign policy machine and fashion his own commitment to world order, regardless of public and congressional opinion. In the past, policymaking powers had typically drifted around Washington between one administration and the next, from the strong State Department of Dean Acheson and John Foster Dulles to the loosely organized Kitchen Cabinets of Presidents Kennedy and Johnson. As a result, decisions had been made in a chaotic, *ad hoc* atmosphere which lacked consistency and framework; the new President decided that such practice should cease. And besides, Nixon had long fancied himself a statesman;

most of his government experience had been in the foreign policy field, and before expressing interest in the Presidency this time around, he had appeared to be grooming himself as the next Republican Secretary of State.

For somewhat different reasons, Kissinger agreed that policy planning should be centered in the White House. For Kissinger, the balance-of-power diplomat, had long believed that world equilibrium was based on the constant threat of force, and that respect for the United States rested on the fear of its enormous military machine. At times, secret talks and well-placed overtures could avert military engagements that were not in the interest of the United States; at others, where an escalation to armed conflict seemed necessary, the decisions must be made and the orders carried out by a few top men who acted with the greatest of speed. Such a policy of threat demanded a high degree of centralization—and the resulting Nixon-Kissinger policy structure was designed to circumvent those forces in government, such as Congress and the Cabinet bureaucracies, which were considered extraneous to that approach.

In addition, Kissinger realized that the policy of threat would be a failure if Nixon could not appear unfettered by others—inside Washington and out—who had claims on the President's conduct of foreign affairs. In as early a tract as *A World Restored*, Kissinger had written that "the impetus of domestic policy is a direct social experience; but that of foreign policy is not actual, but potential experience—the threat of war—which statesmanship attempts to avoid being made explicit." In other words, popular opinion was little more than an encumbrance on those few who were capable of making decisions. For if the foreign diplomat were allowed to feel that the President's policy could be swayed by domestic upheavals, then the credibility of threat—the linchpin of the policy—would ultimately collapse.

Corollary to the policy of threat was the notion that the United States would keep its promises and fulfill its commitments no matter what the price. For the ultimate failure of diplomacy was to lose credibility, and there was a feeling for the honor of a great power that went very deep in Kissinger. There was the idea that a faulted credibility in one area of the world would surely lead to disaster in another, because for Kissinger all the great troublespots of the world were lined up on a single continuum that connected the two superpowers: the Soviet Union and the United States. Should the Russians violate the ceasefire lines in the Mideast, then the President must be free to respond in Cambodia. And if the policy made no sense in cost-benefit analysis, at least it would proceed from strategic thinking which transcended the day-to-day pressures of political life.

NEEDLESS TO SAY, KISSINGER felt that the Presidency was the only office of government which could determine and execute foreign policy in the way it should properly be conducted. Congress was an impediment; its members, by and large, were not properly schooled in the hard-fought, intricate practice of diplomatic affairs, and were more likely to respond to the uninformed concerns of their voters, to the shoddy tug-and-pull of the popular political process, than to the ar-

duous twists and turns of great power relationships. The bureaucracy, too, was an enemy: no imagination, no flair, no speed or adaptability, little grasp of the sacrifices and risks one must incur if one were to maintain a flexible policy. And as for popular opinion, Kissinger's interest lay not in how the votes would be cast today, but in how the Executive structure would be affected by domestic reactions to the policy when that policy had finally run its course five or ten years later. His overwhelming concern was how well the White House could continue to function as the major force in foreign policy, whether popular opinion would one day rise up and destroy the Presidency as an instrument of diplomatic relations.

In a series of meetings held at the end of November 1968, Nixon invited Kissinger to accept the post of foreign policy assistant and proposed a revival of the National Security Council. Set up under Truman after World War II to coordinate policy planning, the NSC system had long since fallen into obscurity, but Nixon viewed it as an instrument of restoring to the White House a critical measure of flexibility and control over policy decisions. More than anything else, Nixon dreaded being handed a single policy recommendation which, more often than not, might be a compromise policy, an effort on the part of several differing agencies which had subdued their disagreements and presented the White House with a position it could then only accept or reject. Underlying the revived NSC structure was the so-called "options" system; the recommendations of each agency would be solicited by the White House and then screened for the NSC and Nixon by Kissinger and his staff.

It was clear that, in such a scheme, the White House would hold predominance in the policy field. How much influence Kissinger would have—as opposed to Nixon's other advisors—was not yet evident. As the "options" man, Kissinger would be expected to give a fair, objective account of each alternative; as confidential advisor to the President, his strength would rest more on his personal relationship with Nixon than on his policymaking abilities—a relationship that would have been very difficult to predict. "I suppose what really was clear was that Kissinger did not intend to become a man of particular influence," Thomas Schelling, Kissinger's closest colleague on the Harvard faculty, said recently. "I think he honestly thought that there was a more detached role for himself."

But for astute presidential observers, the news of Kissinger's supremacy in foreign policy was not long in coming. In December 1968, he flew to Key Biscayne to present Nixon with a set of blueprints for the revived NSC system—and William P. Rogers, the new Secretary of State, was already out in the cold. No longer would it be as necessary for the Secretary to meet with the President on an informal basis, as Acheson and Dulles and Rusk before him had done; like all other Cabinet members who dealt in foreign policy, his ideas would no longer be brought directly to Nixon, but would have to pass first through a system which Kissinger administered. And when Rogers met with the President and his national security advisor, he was completely overshadowed, so outclassed by Kissinger that he would rarely see Nixon in Kissinger's presence anymore. "He avoids his confrontations with

Henry because he knows he'll make a fool out of him," one State Department official said recently.

**K**ISSINGER WAS A TOWERING FIGURE amid the rest of the Nixon appointees. None could compare with him in terms of sheer mental preparation for the job. One Harvard colleague said of Kissinger that his present position is "the culmination of his career as a student of international affairs." And it is probable that Kissinger came into his job better prepared than either of his predecessors under Kennedy and Johnson, not to mention those whom Nixon had just appointed to other, less rigorous posts, the men who had won their jobs as political favors, not by sheer intellectual breadth.

More important, though, Nixon and Kissinger shared a vital number of deeply-held concerns. They were very much preoccupied with the strength and power of the Presidency, with the need to maintain one's independence and maneuverability in a politically fluid world. Most of the others in Nixon's retinue were men of politics, men who could be restrained by adverse domestic feeling or be deterred from a policy that seemed to make no material sense. But Nixon, a President determined to behave in a presidential way, and Kissinger, the great power diplomat, would brook no compromise. And Nixon's personal relationship with Kissinger, unfettered as it was by ulterior political motives, became deep and profound. Kissinger is the President's only post-1960 acquaintance to have become a member of his personal inner circle. He sees Nixon more frequently than do any of his other appointees. And as Nixon's confidant, Kissinger passes the crucial judgments on the very options that he and his staff have laid out.

But Kissinger's coup of the Cabinet departments was not as simple as that. It involved a devious circumvention of the bureaucracy through the skillful use of study memoranda and detailed, lengthy questionnaires. According to several men who were close associates of Kissinger at the time, Kissinger came to power determined not to rely on normal channels for information concerning each of the policy undertakings. His attitude was that one couldn't expect anything imaginative or innovative from the bureaucracy, that one would instead have to develop pipelines of one's own. And so he proceeded to ensnare the Cabinet departments in a series of useless policy studies which left them very much on the short end of decision-making.

Kissinger's first act as Nixon's advisor was to commission an options memorandum on the progress of the war in Vietnam; he began work on the study as early as December 1968. In the months preceding the study, the military state of affairs in Indochina had been the subject of a raging controversy inside the various departments. The outgoing presidential advisors and the upper crust of Washington's foreign service were claiming that the NLF had grown significantly weaker since the Tet offensive the previous February, that the communist military campaign would fold in a matter of months. But the lower echelon, often closer to the truth than were their superiors, said rightly that the guerrillas were merely regrouping forces and growing stronger all the time—that, in effect, the entire American military effort had been a failure. Since the higher-ranking officials had regularly suppressed the op-

posing view in their conversations with the White House, the consultants whom Kissinger had commissioned to write the study now felt it especially necessary to get word to Nixon of what the second group was saying—which was now possible for the first time, because Kissinger and the NSC were already committed to forego the compromise policy formula and unfold the disagreements for the President.

**K**ISSINGER'S SOLUTION WAS TO SPLIT the Vietnam memorandum in two; the first part would contain a list of options on what to do about Vietnam, and the second would be a list of specific questions on the progress of the war. It was the questions part of the study—the first in what became known as National Security Study Memoranda—which Kissinger said had been designed to reveal the differing points of view. This he proposed to accomplish in an unprecedented way—by putting identical sets of questions to different departments, questions which, in the case of most agencies, fell clearly outside their range of primary responsibility. The CIA, for example, was asked to file a report on the proficiency of ARVN—a task which had always belonged to the military command in Vietnam. One result of the questionnaire, undoubtedly, was that many estimates suddenly became more honest; for example, the military command decided for the first time to abandon the “attrition” rationale for sustained US ground action in Vietnam. In similar manner, the State and Defense Departments showed up each other's positions on the war.

But the major result of the questionnaire seems to have been that it tied up and discredited the bureaucracy as a whole. The high-level officials were now as shamed as their underlings, and entire agencies were seen in outright conflict. Furthermore, the questions themselves were long and bulky—merely sorting out the answers required a major effort on the part of Kissinger's own staff. And by the time the series of National Security Study Memoranda—on Vietnam and on each of the remaining issues of foreign policy—had been completed, Nixon and Kissinger had already taken the crucial steps in shaping the new Administration's approach to policy. “They had us tied up here for months and months,” one State Department official ruminated recently on the NSSM series. “One wonders whether they've been used in the formulation of foreign policy.”

In fact, Kissinger's use of the NSSM series to tie up Washington's civil service was a blunt, cynical attempt to alter the effectiveness of the National Security Council setup. The options system had been designed to curtail the influence of the bureaucracy, not to remove it; but when the dust had cleared, the Cabinet departments had been rendered virtually ineffective in the choosing of policy. By foreclosing one source of ideas, Kissinger had eliminated the options that would derive from it. The result was that his own office had been measurably strengthened.

As if this were not enough, Kissinger also proceeded to strike the “immediate withdrawal” alternative from the options half of the Vietnam memorandum, leaving his current Vietnamization plan as the most moderate of all the options listed. Thus, even before the paper had gone to the National Security Council, Kissinger had made



*Henry Kissinger*

the crux of the Administration's final choice inevitable: the United States was not going to leave Vietnam without exacting a price from the NLF and Hanoi. By thus manipulating the options system, Kissinger had unilaterally made a crucial choice.

With the concentration of power in Kissinger's office, congressional investigation of policymaking—which was never very comprehensive—has reached a new low in effectiveness. As confidential advisor to the President, Kissinger has successfully claimed “executive privilege” when asked to testify on the record in congressional hearings. As a result, the only contact that Kissinger has with Congress is through informal, intermittent briefing sessions with House and Senate leaders. And even those briefings appear to be empty exercises, for Kissinger is subjected to them only when the President decides they are necessary. For example, a one-time leading member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee—former Sen. Albert Gore—said recently that he did not know of any White House briefing sessions with Congress preceding the decision to invade Cambodia last year.

Kissinger's refusal to testify on the record would not be a particular departure from past practice if the power concentrated in his office were not so weighty. Traditionally most presidential advisors were also heads of departments; they were responsible to Congress, both through the appro-

priations process and as Administration representatives. But not Kissinger; his stranglehold on policy, combined with his congressional immunity, has cut off vast amounts of information on White House policymaking from Capitol Hill's purview. Congressional resentment on this subject reached a high pitch last March, when Stuart Symington, a member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, charged on the Senate floor that Kissinger was "Secretary of State in everything but title," and that the appearance before congressional committees by William Rogers had become "a rather empty exercise."

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Symington is right, of course, for Kissinger is the second most important policymaker besides Nixon himself. There is not a single important international issue on which he does not have a major say; even on the subject of the Middle East—which Kissinger generally leaves to the State Department, partly because of his Jewish background—he has emerged at crucial points to warn against a growing Soviet presence. One of Kissinger's ex-staff assistants recently went so far as to suggest that the Middle East has been tossed to Rogers as a political bone because it is not a major issue—"which it may well be if you leave it to Rogers long enough."

But if Henry Kissinger's experience as White House administrator has demonstrated anything, it is that obedience to the orderly process of government is basically incompatible with the role of the cunning diplomat. For if he were obligated to predicate his actions upon such obstacles as popular will and honest information, then his actions could be predicted and the diplomat's flexibility—his capacity to pursue a policy of threat—would rapidly diminish. And if Kissinger was determined to accomplish anything, it was to remove every conceivable constraint from policymaking so that the President's calculated guile could run its course. If the bureaucracy could be curbed, and Congress circumvented, then the policy of threat would become a reality. And that is precisely what Kissinger engineered.

*"However we got into Vietnam, whatever the judgment of our actions, ending the war honorably is essential for the peace of the world."*

IF THERE WERE A SINGLE APT IMAGE for Henry Kissinger's role in Vietnam, it would be one of the global diplomat clinging to stability, maintaining order, concerned with honor and prestige. And it is in Vietnam that the Nixon-Kissinger policy has reached the limit of its logic and faced the acid test.

There was once a time when the war was not a Nixon-Kissinger enterprise, when it was something the new Administration had inherited and—so it seemed—was publicly committed to dissolve. But with the extension of the ground fighting into Cambodia, Laos, and briefly, North Vietnam—as well as the drastic escalation of air attacks all over Southeast Asia—the war has become very much an ingredient of Nixon-Kissinger policy. And it is a policy that originated not in the bowels of the Pentagon, not in an overweening bureaucracy's forward thrust, but in the

clearly visible diplomatic ambitions of the President and his aides.

To begin with, there was the survival of the regime in Saigon. It was a regime that past American policymakers had installed and then sworn to uphold, and though the new American leaders probably had little real use for General Thieu—and were suffering the domestic consequences of what little use they had—they also felt it essential that no American policy precipitate the collapse of the South Vietnamese regime. For that would impugn their honor and damage their credibility, and those were concepts that did not come cheap to them. And in the absence of the regime's guaranteed survival—a guarantee which Hanoi and the NLF adamantly refused to extend—the only American recourse would be the use of sheer physical might, combined with the threat of additional force if their opponents did not give in.

Kissinger is fond of calling himself the "Walt Rostow of peace by negotiations"; but in his diplomat's creed, negotiation is merely another tool to enforce one's will, a tool to which overtures, threats, and finally the use of force itself are all fixed as perpetual adjuncts. Kissinger's early advocacy of negotiations, his expressed belief that a compromise could be reached with Hanoi and the NLF, were rooted in the assumption that the overpowering weight of the US military stood behind America's negotiators at every step of the way. And in a situation of fixed objectives—that of the NLF and Hanoi, to bring about a revolution in their country, and that of Washington, to uphold the Saigon regime—the use of force would be bound to increase.

In fact, the very nature of US involvement in Southeast Asia had made the repeated use of force inevitable. For the American mission in Vietnam had long been a calculated, cynical enterprise; despite claims of protecting a "legitimate" government from aggressive communism, the American goal there had become a frankly neo-colonial one. For Kissinger, revolutionary ideology—no matter what its justification—was at best irrelevant and at worst harmful in the context of international conflict; to him, revolution meant not a change in the human condition but a clouding of the prospects for stability.

And so when an American administration dealt with a revolutionary power, Kissinger believed it should attempt to eliminate the ideological element of the struggle by forcing its opponent to behave in more traditional terms. For it was a cardinal rule of balance-of-power diplomacy that when countries entered the international arena, they acted like nation-states. They were compromising, malleable, and—for purposes of conflict—ideologically "clean." They became supple and entered negotiations when threatened with—or confronted by—the use of force.

But with a truly revolutionary liberation force, the United States—in spite of all the military machinery at its disposal—could reach no understanding or mutual trust; her outlook, her diplomacy, her negotiating language were all alien to such a force. And in the absence of common ground, the only way to draw an ideological renegade down to one's level was with the ever-increasing threat and use of force.

In fact, Kissinger has constantly underestimated the resistance power of Hanoi and the NLF by failing to take



account of their politics and ideology. His calculation of the opponent's strength has long assumed a willingness on the opponent's part to accept a compromise solution and forsake deeply-held, legitimate political and social goals. But if the roots of his failure lie in his application of great-power diplomacy in a situation that consistently repudiates it, Kissinger has also been intimately involved in the physical escalation of the war.

For the past two and a half years, his office has supervised the flow of war material in and out of Vietnam. He himself has become a crucial figure in setting defense spending and manpower levels, often overruling Cabinet officials on these matters. And last, he has also dealt in grand military strategy; not that he decides on whether this or that village should be napalmed, but ideas for implementing each of the major escalations have come from Kissinger's office. And he is more acutely aware than most that there are many civilian deaths in a hard-fought guerrilla war.

**T**HERE WAS A TIME, just before his accession to office in January 1969, that many of Kissinger's academic colleagues — as well as many in the government — assumed that he would rapidly seek to extricate the United States from the Vietnam war. They should have known better; Kissinger had been hard and cynical on the issue all along.

As soon as the war had begun in 1961, Kissinger became an enthusiastic supporter of the American intervention, believing it necessary for the United States to demonstrate its power in that tender spot on the globe. In 1965, he began consulting for the State Department on the government's pacification program, and remained a conventional hawk until 1966, when he traveled to Vietnam at the request of Ambassador Henry Cabot Lodge. As a result of that visit, he decided, as one colleague put it, "that the thing was undo-able," and he became convinced of the need to withdraw.

But he determined that any American withdrawal would have to meet two requirements: first, that it not cause the collapse of the Saigon regime soon after withdrawal, for otherwise, America's international (and domestic) standing would lose; and second, that the withdrawal have as little adverse effect as possible on the decision-making structure of this country, that particularly the Presidency must be preserved as the leading formulator of foreign policy. In concrete terms, that meant that neither Congress nor public opinion could be allowed to coerce the United States out of Vietnam.

On the surface, Kissinger believed that America's withdrawal could best be pursued through negotiation. Part of this belief doubtless sprang from what one colleague later called a "David Susskind syndrome," the notion that on first meeting one's opponent face to face the conflict could rapidly be solved; but Kissinger's optimism was born of a deeper attitude that the NLF and the North Vietnamese, dedicated revolutionaries though they were, would one day be responsive to the overwhelming power of the American military, that they could be threatened and—if necessary—beaten into submission.

This attitude, however, was not entirely visible on the eve of Kissinger's accession, because in 1967 and 1968 he had privately put forward a position on the war that made

him look far more dovish than anyone in academia, let alone government: the notion of the "decent interval." According to this scheme, an agreement permitting the collapse of the Saigon regime would be negotiated privately with the North Vietnamese. The plan was for the United States to begin removing forces at a rapid rate; after all of them had finally departed, the rebel forces would sit tight for a previously agreed-on period of time. Finally, after this "decent interval" — designed to dissociate American withdrawal from the fall of Saigon and thus eliminate the appearance of American failure — the insurgents would then rise up and destroy the South Vietnamese regime. Thus, Hanoi would have achieved its goals, the United States would have been successfully disengaged, and the structure of America's international relations would remain essentially intact.

On entering office, Kissinger abandoned the idea of negotiating a "decent interval" with the North Vietnamese. Many factors could have contributed to his change of position: the North Vietnamese may have met such a suggestion with skepticism and distrust; and it was unclear that Nixon had ever approved of the interval idea at all, that he was willing to sacrifice the Saigon regime in talks with Hanoi. In any event, the decent interval was transformed into what was known in White House jargon as "firebreak"; the United States would leave Vietnam in a show of military force, and only after Saigon had been sufficiently shored up so that it might survive on its own. With the "decent interval" the South Vietnamese would only have been given a year or two to last after the final American withdrawals; but now, under "firebreak," Saigon would be guaranteed a minimum of three to five years — a guarantee which the American Administration proposed to keep, if necessary, by physical force.

In fact, the new Administration began almost immediately to treat US involvement in Vietnam as a military conquest. In March 1969, a contingent of US Marines entered Laos in a mission now known as Dewey Canyon I — a mission which even a number of close Kissinger aides did not know of at the time. The bombing of predominantly civilian areas in Laos was vastly stepped up, and the US air command began the use of B-52s in raids on Cambodia that May. Throughout this period, Kissinger was telling visitors — particularly student groups — that the war would be over soon, that the Administration needed only nine more months to master the situation and begin to move the US out.

But then, it was not so surprising that Kissinger would consciously misrepresent the Administration's position. For it was part and parcel of great-power diplomacy that one must lie and distort to attain one's ends. And in fact it was Kissinger who — more than anybody else in the White House — perpetuated the myth to colleagues and friends that the United States was gradually extricating itself from Indochina and would continue to do so regardless of the circumstances. In private meetings with visitors — and in background sessions with the press — Kissinger continued to imply that American withdrawal would soon be final and unconditional. "He never said it that way," one former Defense Department official said recently, "but in a way that he gave people the impression that the President was really getting us out of Vietnam."

BY THE FALL OF 1969, IT HAD BECOME CLEAR to critical observers that the new Administration was not going to opt for immediate extrication; the removal of ground troops was slow and inconclusive, and the rest of the war machinery continued to pound away at all of Indochina. President Nixon's November 1969 nationwide address—the Vietnamization speech, largely of Kissinger's design—was an attempt to buy time for the war by neutralizing domestic opposition, time which would be spent to practice strategy and tactics against the NLF and Hanoi. As one former White House consultant recently put it, "It then occurred to the people that what he [Kissinger] basically had in mind was a policy of threat." And the US invasion of Cambodia some months later demonstrated clearly that the political strategy had remained the same, regardless of military conditions.

Not that Cambodia made any sense from a military point of view. In fact, each of the major reasons which the Administration cited as provoking the invasion was a greater falsehood than the next. Nixon claimed in his speech that South Vietnam was threatened by the sudden appearance of the North Vietnamese on its Cambodian flank, yet subsequent reports have shown that the North Vietnamese had in fact been drifting westward and waiting cautiously to see what action the rightist military junta of Lon Nol — who had overthrown neutralist Prince Norodom Sihanouk the month before—would take against them. And a major *ex post facto* rationale for the invasion — that it closed the port of Sihanoukville — is an even greater fabrication: authoritative Administration sources now state that Sihanoukville was closed to the communists by Sihanouk himself in late 1969 in an effort to force the North Vietnamese in Cambodia to recognize Sihanouk's territorial rights at the end of their war with the United States. According to sources in the Administration's intelligence network, all the correct information had been placed on Kissinger's desk in the form of intelligence reports some time before the decision to invade.

It is true that the White House received vastly conflicting reports on the military and political situation inside Cambodia. But the certainty with which Nixon presented the invasion to the American public was in itself a bold-faced lie. And the political motivations for Cambodia clearly originated with Nixon and Kissinger. On an international level, America's great nemesis and North Vietnam's principal supporter — the Soviet Union — had moved new, powerful missiles into the Middle East. The North Vietnamese were posing an implicit threat to the regime of America's ally, Lon Nol. At home, congressional liberals had repudiated the White House on Judge Carswell and the Family Assistance Plan. Nixon and Kissinger wanted to show all these forces that the Administration was strong, manly, and unpredictable. And without consulting either Congress—or at any great length—the Secretaries of State and Defense, the White House moved ahead and made the decision with full speed.

Because Kissinger's conversations with Nixon are secret, it is unclear precisely what role he played in the decision to invade Cambodia. It seems evident, however, that he recommended some form of escalation—such as the bombing of North Vietnam—and it is well-known that he supported the decision that Nixon finally made. And it is certain that

the action was perfectly consonant with Kissinger's notions of the use and threat of force.

The invasion of Cambodia was an incontestable expression of a policy that the Administration had been following all along: escalation and graduated threat. As a result of the action, Allied forces are now fighting in Cambodia, and the United States has been committed to a defense of Lon Nol as well as Thieu-Ky. And the invasion was a jumping-off point for other aggressive actions by which the United States has simultaneously attempted to demonstrate its strength and unpredictability: a brutal bombing raid on North Vietnam last November and the ground invasion of Laos by the South Vietnamese last February.

The Laos invasion — the first real test of "Vietnamization" — was a miserable failure; one ex-staff assistant remarked recently of Kissinger, "His policy is in the same position as Johnson's was in '68, and he knows it." Nonetheless, the failure in Laos has merely deflected the US effort to escalate the war. For although US ground troops continue to pour out of South Vietnam, Nixon's and Kissinger's refusal to set a deadline for withdrawal seems to indicate plans for leaving a residual force — one that will be small enough not to offend the American public and yet large enough to sustain Saigon indefinitely. And with the machinery of American involvement in South Vietnam — the bombers, the spy planes, the computers and automated battlefields — left intact, further escalation may well take the form of renewed bombing of the North, and, perhaps, the destruction of Hanoi and Haiphong.

For his own part, Kissinger is certainly willing to escalate further. He is hard-line and uncompromising. The more frustrated a problem gets, the more vindictive and personalized his judgment becomes. And he has yet to recognize that it would require little less than wholesale slaughter to defeat Hanoi and the NLF in their native lands. "Henry," an ex-aide said recently, "is not willing to accept the imbalance of power which is there as a reality."

The regimes which Nixon and Kissinger seek to defend in Southeast Asia are among the most cruel and totalitarian in the world. Their leaders imprison their political enemies, commit indiscriminate murder, and impose a rule of terror and dictatorship on their native populations. And it is not out of some perverted sense of fairness or democracy that these regimes are being defended. It is out of a harsh, brutal calculation of what an imperialist power like the United States must do to maintain itself in the world.

If smaller, more vulnerable men like Lt. William Calley can be sentenced for killing women and children in Vietnam, then there must be a higher tribunal for statesmen like Kissinger, who uphold the policies which make such atrocities necessary. But then, there is always the danger of lapsing into academic exercises about old atrocities when other deeper-lying ones have yet to surface. And if Henry Kissinger can be accused of anything, it is playing his power game so well that his policy threatens to explode the very balance of forces which he has so ruthlessly defended.

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*David Landau, managing editor for the Harvard Crimson, is now finishing his thesis on Henry Kissinger. A version of this article appeared in the Crimson.*

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