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JUNE 1999

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KISSINGER'S real achievement in *A World Restored* is his writing: a seamless blending of portraiture, philosophy, and international relations. Metternich, Kissinger wrote,

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 the eighteenth-century aristocracy which justified itself not by its truth but by its existence. And if he never came to terms with the new age it was not because he failed to understand its seriousness but because he disdained it.... Had Metternich been born fifty years earlier, he would still have been a conservative, but there would have been no need to write pedantic disquisitions about the nature of conservatism. He would have ... conduct[ed] his diplomacy with the circuitousness which is a symbol of certainty, of a world in which everybody understands intangibles in the same manner. He would still have played at philosophy, for this was the vogue of the eighteenth century, but he would not have considered it a tool of policy. But, in a century of seemingly permanent revolution, philosophy was the only means of rescuing universality from contingent claims.

It is such elegance, thickness of meaning, and narrative ability that puts *A World Restored* into a higher category of literature than the mere policy writings of the rest of the foreign-affairs community. By concentrating on personalities -- Metternich, Castlereagh, Talleyrand -- Kissinger demonstrated that policy is not made in an emotional vacuum by "objective" people. The religious and social backgrounds of officials are inseparable from their opinions. Policymaking, like lovemaking, is an intensely human activity.

The young Kissinger also realized that a determined policymaker must be in a state of constant tension with the bureaucracy. "Profound policy thrives on perpetual creation..... Good administration thrives on routine," he wrote. Foreign Service officers tend to support those policies that do not threaten their jobs and chances for promotion. I have found that many of them just want to get through the day. A Secretary of State who follows these instincts, rather than manipulating and coopting them, is a failed Secretary of State.

This brings me to Kissinger himself, whose personal history caused him to be obsessed with appeasement -- sometimes with ironic results. His ideas for maintaining America's share of world power at a time of military debacle abroad and civic disorder at home led him to conduct policy in secret and to battle with the bureaucracy. Like many who seek power in order to do something with it rather than merely to enhance their résumés and self-esteem, he thrived on enemies. Though he has been gone from office for more than two decades, Kissinger hovers over many foreign-policy discussions to a degree that more likable and recent Secretaries of State, such as Shultz and Cyrus Vance, do not.

Both the frequency and the nature of the attacks against Kissinger avouch his centrality. Criticism of him has often been obsessive and compartmental -- and devastating. There are those who despise Kissinger the wiretapper, those who despise him for betraying Cyprus, those who, like me, have faulted him for bombing Cambodia. But when it comes to Kissinger's use of realpolitik as a counter to America's missionary bent, serious critics have respectfully argued with him more often than denounced him.

A grimly convincing view of the human condition may be all that Kissinger ever had to offer. Despite his historical acumen, he has not always been clairvoyant: for example, he saw the Cold War as continuing indefinitely. Kissinger seems to have lacked the piercing momentary insight that George Ball displayed when he warned the Kennedy and Johnson Administrations against further involvement in Vietnam and that Kennan displayed when he suggested that if the West held fast, the Soviet Union would eventually implode. Loy Henderson, a U.S. diplomat, showed that insight time and time again: in the 1930s he was among the first to warn against Stalin; in the late 1940s he was the first to warn against the Soviet threat to the Caucasus and the Aegean; in the early 1950s he was the first to see that the Iranians would one day come to despise us and the first to see through Nehru's idealism and

vanity to the anti-Americanism beneath the surface.

Kissinger's perceptiveness has been limited to the present and the past. Although he did not foresee the sudden end of communism, from his study of Castlereagh's dealings with Czar Alexander I he knew how to approach Moscow: because Russians are so sensitive to unfavorable comparisons with Europeans, try to give them the form if not the substance of what they want. Thus Kissinger wrested Egypt and Syria from the Soviet orbit while inviting Moscow to be a co-host of the late-1973 Middle East peace conference that helped to formalize the new American regional order.

VIETNAM is the crucible in which Kissinger's realism reached a pitiless extreme, and the one by which he will be judged.

My only approach toward Kissinger himself came in 1991, when I requested an interview with him for a book I was writing about Middle East specialists in the State Department. Kissinger was one of a handful of people, out of the hundreds I asked, who refused to see or even speak to me. Many people I know professionally in the journalistic and policy communities, and whom I respect, despise Kissinger. It is not easy for me to put forward this argument.

Scholars and journalists assert that Nixon and Kissinger might have ended the war in 1969, on terms similar to the ones they settled for in 1973, and prevented the deaths of 22,000 more U.S. combatants; that the two men bombed North Vietnamese cities indiscriminately with B-52s for a negotiating advantage so slight that it was forgotten a few months afterward; and that they waged war in Cambodia illegally and with limited results, except to precipitate the Khmer Rouge takeover in 1975, however unwittingly (a point I made in my book *The Ends of the Earth*).

Kissinger's critics also note that many of these actions were taken not only for policy reasons but also for sometimes sleazy political motives. The secret invasion of Cambodia, William Shawcross asserted in his meticulously researched book *Sideshow: Kissinger, Nixon and the Destruction of Cambodia* (1979), was, among other things, the vehicle Kissinger used to help him consolidate his power within the bureaucracy.

All this I accept. But I believe that other issues should be raised. In the overwhelming majority of foreign-policy crises sordid domestic political motives and interagency infighting play a significant role. So the real questions are What were Kissinger's (and Nixon's) primary rather than

secondary motives in continuing the war? and Did their actions have any result beyond the tragic loss of thousands of American and Southeast Asian lives?

Even the harshest journalistic accounts make clear that Kissinger and Nixon genuinely felt, despite the public outcry, that continuing the war was necessary for America to sustain its strategic position worldwide. Shawcross wrote that the two men were influenced by both the "Munich mentality" and the memory of how President Eisenhower ended the Korean War -- by threatening the Chinese and the North Koreans. To Kissinger and Nixon, playing tough was not a surrealistic abstraction but something necessary and definable. However wrong the stance they took may appear in hindsight, Kissinger and Nixon did what they thought was right for the country's interests, knowing they would be reviled -- especially among the intellectual elite, who usually have the last word in writing history.

Now, isn't that exactly how we want -- or at least how we say we want -- our leaders to act? Isn't what angers so many people about President Bill Clinton and other current politicians the fact that they make policy according to the results of public-opinion polls rather than to their own conviction? It may be the case that polling is unfairly criticized -- that for a leader to base his or her decisions on public opinion is not so bad after all, especially if one has in mind the case of Kissinger and Nixon. It is also likely that in prolonging the war for the reasons they did, Kissinger and Nixon demonstrated more real character than do many of our present leaders.

For the Nixon Administration, Vietnam was only one aspect of a larger foreign policy -- a policy that brought about significant achievements. To insist that those achievements would have taken place had the Administration withdrawn from Vietnam in 1969 -- and that such an early withdrawal would have gone smoothly -- is rash.

To understand the context of those achievements, it is useful to consult the "U.S. History" section of *The World Almanac*. The almanac says that in April of 1969 U.S. forces in Vietnam "peaked at 543,400" and "withdrawal started July 8th," six months into Nixon's first term. In 1971 U.S. forces in Vietnam "were down to 140,000" and the "last U.S. combat troops left August 11," 1972. The almanac reports some other facts. During the three years it took the Nixon Administration to withdraw combat troops -- a year less than it took Charles de Gaulle to end French involvement in the Algerian war, capping his heroic reputation -- "Nixon arrived in Beijing Feb. 21 [1972] for

an 8-day visit to China.... The unprecedented visit ended with a joint communiqué pledging that both powers would work for 'a normalization of relations.'" And "In the first visit of a U.S. president to Moscow, Nixon arrived May 22 for a week of summit talks with Kremlin leaders that culminated in a landmark strategic arms pact." The almanac might also have noted that in September of 1970 -- soon after Nixon made it clear that he was withdrawing slowly, and bloodily, from Vietnam -- threats by Nixon to Moscow helped to stop Syrian tanks from crossing farther into Jordan and toppling King Hussein's pro-Western government. One could also note that in 1973 and 1974 Kissinger, serving Nixon and then Gerald Ford, manipulated the Yom Kippur War toward a stalemate that was convenient for American interests, and then brokered agreements between Israel and its Arab adversaries for a separation of forces. These deals allowed Washington to re-establish diplomatic relations with Egypt and Syria for the first time since their rupture following the Six-Day War, in 1967. The agreements also set the context for the Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty of 1979 and helped stabilize relations between Israel and Syria to this day.

The point is not that Nixon and Kissinger withdrew methodically from Vietnam instead of continuing to fight the war that Johnson had escalated by using ground troops, or that elsewhere in the world they performed impressively. Rather, the point is that in the course of conducting the first large-scale American troop withdrawal in our history, under openly humiliating circumstances (more than half a million soldiers of an industrial army were running away from a Third World guerrilla force), the two men actually improved America's geopolitical position vis-à-vis China, the Soviet Union, and the Arab world. This did not occur because of the withdrawal. A typical response I receive when I mention to the political-science community the Nixon Administration's withdrawal from Vietnam is "What do you mean, 'withdrawal'? They prolonged the war unnecessarily! And what about the Christmas bombings [against North Vietnam in December of 1972] and the attacks on Cambodia [which didn't end until August of 1973]?" Indeed, some of Nixon's and Kissinger's actions were so spectacularly brutal, and unnecessary, that they almost obscure the fact of the withdrawal itself. How much more convincing, and nihilistic, can realism get?

Nixon's diplomatic success in China came nearly two months after a heavy air bombardment of North Vietnam, which may have figured in how the Chinese leaders -- the hardest of men, whose hands were freshly bloodied by the Great Cultural Revolution -- sized up their American visitors. Hans Morgenthau wrote,

The prestige of a nation is its reputation for power. That reputation, the reflection of the reality of power in the mind of the observers, can be as important as the reality of power itself. What others think about us is as important as what we actually are.

In effect, Nixon and Kissinger caused copious bloodshed in Vietnam for the sake of our reputation among our Cold War adversaries: the Chinese and Soviet leaderships and their many clients, including the Syrians. Worse, as Walter Isaacson has written in his biography, Kissinger was suspicious of the whole notion of troop withdrawals that were not tied to improvement in North Vietnamese behavior: that was appeasement. Of course, there is no way to prove or disprove connections between the Nixon Administration's cold-bloodedness in Indochina and its ability to project power elsewhere, to America's obvious benefit. Many in the journalistic and policy communities take for granted that there is no connection. Nothing the Nixon Administration did in Indochina, therefore, is justified; a Democratic Administration would just as easily have faced down the Soviet Union and Syria without firing a shot, and would have orchestrated a rapprochement with China after withdrawing quickly from Vietnam in 1969. Might such reasoning be naive? Previous behavior is all we have to go on when we respond to others. The suggestion that leaders in China, the Soviet Union, and elsewhere would respond to Kissinger and Nixon based on their recent behavior in Vietnam is eminently reasonable. What strains credulity is the idea that our Cold War adversaries would *not* take into consideration Kissinger's and Nixon's bloodthirstiness in Indochina in the face of fierce criticism from the American public.

In *Decade of Decisions: American Policy Toward the Arab-Israeli Conflict, 1967-1976* (1977), William B. Quandt wrote that Nixon told a group of newspaper editors at the height of the Jordan crisis that "it would not be such a bad thing if the Soviets believed he was capable of irrational action." The strategy worked -- it kept the peace in the Middle East that year without U.S. military involvement, and it kept a civilized regime in power in Jordan -- perhaps in part because Nixon had already proved his capacity for what many would call "irrational" action. Perceptions are often everything in crises, and Nixon's and Kissinger's record in foreign policy may have been more of a piece than we like to admit.

Was an unproved benefit to our international position worth the loss of so many American and other lives? No. But we will never know for certain what a weaker position

in the Middle East and elsewhere might have cost us and others. In 1982, for example, the Israelis invaded Lebanon and bombed Beirut, killing thousands of innocent people. The bombing also drove Yasser Arafat out of Lebanon. From that moment on Arafat's prestige and power plummeted, until a centrist Israeli politician like the late Yitzhak Rabin could afford to recognize him without risking Israel's security. If Arafat were still running his veritable state-within-a-state in Lebanon, the peace process of the 1990s and Jordan's recognition of Israel would be unimaginable. Yet many Israelis, not to mention Arabs, still criticize the late Prime Minister Menachem Begin for bombing Beirut. Was Begin right? It depends.

TRUTH is the successful effort to think impersonally and inhumanly," Musil wrote. Perhaps Kissinger achieved that awful level of truth in Vietnam, to judge by what he and Nixon accomplished coincident with their bloody retreat. If one feels that it is un-American to think of truth in the way that a world-weary Austrian like Musil did, then why does Kissinger's shadowy presence continue to intrude upon our most fundamental foreign-policy questions? Kissinger, seventy-five, can be judged one of our most notable and interesting modern Secretaries of State, along with Dean Acheson, George Marshall, and Henry Stimson -- realists all. Americans champion idealism while employing realists, perhaps because we need to have a high opinion of ourselves while pursuing our own interests. Kissinger challenged us with a degree of realism whose origins lay partly in a youthful experience that most Americans can barely imagine.

To say that he has challenged us, of course, is not to say that he has improved us. The final judgment on both Kissinger and Nixon may be that they were not sufficiently realistic. True, they were not swayed by opinion polls, as present politicians so often are. But they did not comprehend that even if the public mood should not dictate policy, policy must nevertheless take account of it. By continuing the war after 1969, they badly misjudged the public's appetite for the conflict. Kissinger thus did not live up to the realism of his literary ideal, Metternich. The result of his brand of realism was a foreign policy that some critics call Roman in its cruelty -- and in the non-realist supposition that every corner of the known world is of vital interest to the United States and must be violently defended if necessary. The fact that we have moved away from that policy shows how different our destiny might be from that of Rome's fallen empire.

As regards Musil's inhuman truth, Kissinger's description in *A World Restored* of the peace that followed the Napoleonic Wars bears repeating, for what we may have to

expect in the post-Cold War era.

When peace finally came to Europe ... it was greeted not only with relief but with a feeling of disillusion as well. The suffering of a period of revolutionary war can be sustained only by millennial hopes, by the vision of a world free of problems.... Yet the greater these expectations, the more severe the inevitable disenchantment. There must come a point when it is realized that the exaltation of war is not transferable to the problems of peace, that harmony is an attribute of [wartime] coalitions but not of "legitimate" orders, that stability is not equivalent to the *consciousness* of universal reconciliation.... "Everything that occurred after 1815 [following the defeat of Napoleon]," Metternich wrote in 1819, "belongs to the course of ordinary history. Since 1815, our period is left to its own devices; it advances because it cannot stop, but it is no longer guided."

We are back to "ordinary history," with the difference between Metternich's and our own time being one of scale -- demographic, environmental, technological, and military. Peaceful times are also superficial times, in which we concentrate on social imperfections because the political order appears secure, and judge Cabinet members not on how they perform but on how they perform at press conferences. Such times never last. The end of the Cold War merely set the parameters for the next struggle for survival.

As we seek perfection in our officials through an increasingly intense legal scrutiny, and reap an increasingly sallow form of mediocrity instead, there will come times -- perhaps dangerous and violent times -- when we will be more forgiving toward those who were supremely imperfect in their character yet unafraid to challenge the public mood. The waging of the decades-long Cold War, which rarely seemed heroic at the time (unless one had the useful corrective, as I and others did, of experiencing firsthand the subjugation of Eastern Europe), is already acquiring a valorous cast. The Soviet Union really did run an "evil empire," and during those years it was absolutely essential for us to maintain a reputation for unflinching firmness. The fact that a few leaders would go to cruel extremes might have been anticipated. Because history is by nature tragic, and because awful choices are certainly part of our future, I suspect that Kissinger -- and Nixon, too -- will ultimately be judged more charitably. As for Albright, she has yet to be tested nearly to the degree that

Kissinger was in Vietnam. She has yet to move emotionally beyond Munich toward Kissinger's ability to turn historical debacle into strategy.

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Illustration by Marvin Mattelson.

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The Atlantic Monthly; June 1999; Kissinger, Metternich, and Realism - 99.06
(Part Two); Volume 283, No. 6; page 73-82.*

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