

THE PROPHET AS STATESMAN: HENRY KISSINGER, SALT AND THE SOVIET UNION

D. BRENT HARDT

Throughout his career as an academic and a statesman, Henry Kissinger has been an articulate advocate of a conceptually-based approach to foreign policy. In this article, D. Brent Hardt explores the relationship between ideas and action in U.S. foreign policy by comparing the ideas that Kissinger developed as an academic with his conduct of foreign policy in the Nixon White House. The author focuses on the areas of central concern both to Kissinger the academic and statesman — negotiations, arms control and the Soviet threat. In evaluating Kissinger's efforts in these areas, he concludes that theoretical approaches to foreign policy can be effective only if their limits are explicitly recognized.

I. INTRODUCTION

“Human history,” wrote H.G. Wells, “is in essence a history of ideas.” Yet ideas achieve historical significance only when they serve as the basis for action. Original ideas become historical when they are held by someone who possesses the power to act upon them. This article seeks to understand the relationship between ideas and action in the conduct of U.S. foreign policy. Henry Kissinger, an academic and foreign policy theoretician who became a policymaker and statesman, presents a unique opportunity to evaluate this historical interaction.

Kissinger was an historian whose overriding interest was the conduct of Soviet-American relations. During his years with the Nixon Administration, he became the central figure in arms-control negotiations with the Soviet Union. By examining the conceptual approach that Kissinger developed on negotiations, arms control and the nature of the Soviet threat, and by comparing these ideas to his conduct of the Strategic Arms Limitation Talks (SALT) with the Soviet Union, an understanding may be gained of the role of conceptual analysis and theory in the formation of foreign policy.

D. Brent Hardt is a candidate for the MALD degree at The Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy.

Kissinger was a master foreign policy theoretician, but the degree of his success as a statesman in the Nixon White House remains ambiguous. While the theoretician is judged by his conceptions alone, the statesman must implement his vision. The test of a statesman, according to Kissinger, "is the permanence of his structure under stress."¹ This test Kissinger failed. The "careful design" for global stability he hoped to implement collapsed.

In observing the development of Kissinger's design and in analyzing the reasons for its collapse, this article follows a natural progression in Kissinger's world view. The Soviet threat provided his focal point, and he saw the rest of the world through the prism of Soviet-American relations. His five books and numerous articles are concerned primarily with superpower relations. The interests of the United States and the Soviet Union come into conflict in many areas of the international arena. But no issue is as vital — both to the superpowers and to the world community — as the prevention of nuclear war. And yet, no issue has been more difficult to resolve than the role of nuclear weapons in the Soviet-American relationship. It was precisely this issue that Kissinger explored in greatest depth as an academic.

The central theme in Kissinger's scholarly works is the nature of the relationship between force and diplomacy. "Power," he argued, "which is not clearly related to the objectives for which it is to be employed, may merely serve to paralyze the will. No more urgent task confronts American policy than to bring our power into balance with the issues for which we are most likely to have to contend."² To Kissinger, the development of a strategic doctrine requires translating power into policy and reconciling means with ends. In devising a doctrine, a policymaker must decide either to expand available means to achieve higher goals or to lower the goals to a level commensurate with existing means.

In determining appropriate levels of force, arms control has acquired new significance. Kissinger asks, "What is the significance of adding to the destructiveness of the nuclear arsenal when the enormity of present weapons systems already tends to paralyze the will?"³ The control of arms, an imperative in the nuclear age, is achieved through negotiations. These issues of power and diplomacy, strategic doctrine, arms control and negotiations were Kissinger's scholarly forte, and it is on this forte that he will be evaluated.

In addition, Kissinger's concern for the issues of Soviet-American relations

1. Henry A. Kissinger, *A World Restored* (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1964), p. 187.

2. Henry A. Kissinger, *Nuclear Weapons and Foreign Policy*, (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1957), p. 7.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 133.

involves a more fundamental concern — the need to create a conceptually based foreign policy. This is a policy with ultimate aims and positive goals rather than a negative and defensive policy of containment. Shortly before joining the Nixon Administration, Kissinger wrote that “in the years ahead the most profound challenge to American policy will be philosophical: to develop some concept of order in a world which is bipolar militarily, but multipolar politically.”⁴ Having posed the philosophical challenge of the prophet, Kissinger now faced the political challenge of the statesman. In asking how well he succeeded in translating his prophetic vision into concrete political objectives and achievements, we are asking whether American policy can be both conceptually based and still relevant to the complex problems of the 20th century. Kissinger’s attempt to conduct American foreign relations from a conceptual basis reveals the possibilities as well as the limitations of such an approach.

II. THE PROPHET AND THE STATESMAN

From his earliest years as an academic, Kissinger seemed to have a premonition that he would occupy a prominent place in the history of diplomacy, for his writings reveal a sense of projective biography. In describing the failures of his protagonists Metternich and Castlereagh, he seemed to anticipate the failures he would later face. Like Kissinger, these two men were prophets and statesmen — men with a vision of the requirements of a stable post-war Europe, and men with the diplomatic skill necessary to implement their visions. Kissinger wrote, “both statesmen were defeated in the end by their domestic structure.”⁵ Kissinger, like Castlereagh, would be defeated because he ignored the domestic structure of his state, or perhaps could not comprehend it.

From his early writings, Kissinger appears to have had a vision to offer the American people, but his vision was more a general sense of America’s role in the world than an explicit conception. It was this difficulty in formulating and communicating concrete concepts that Kissinger perceived in the visions of his 19th century protagonists:

The statesman is therefore like one of the heroes in Classical drama who has a vision of the future but who cannot transmit it directly to his fellow-men and who cannot validate its ‘truth.’ Nations learn only by experience; they ‘know’ only when it is too late to act. But statesmen must act as if their intuition were already experience and their aspiration were truth. It is

4. Henry A. Kissinger, *American Foreign Policy*, Expanded Edition (New York: W.W. Norton & Company Inc., 1974), p. 79.

5. Kissinger, *Restored*, p. 323.

for this reason that statesmen often share the fate of prophets . . .⁶

This difficulty of legitimizing programs domestically was also to be Kissinger's fate.

Kissinger's ultimate inability to gain domestic acceptance for his vision led him to emphasize, in his memoirs, his role as a prophet rather than a statesman. He sought to be judged more on the basis of "motives, intentions and purposes — at the level of the individual — than on the effects, results and outcomes at the larger historical level."⁷ Kissinger believed that the conflict between these dual roles "is always tragic because the statesman must strive to reduce the prophet's vision to precise measures, while the prophet will judge the temporal structure by transcendental standards."⁸ Kissinger, as a statesman sought to be judged not on the basis of his actions, but rather on his prophet's vision. Kissinger the academic, however, made a name for himself by judging others' actions by transcendental standards.

In evaluating his 20th century protagonist, President Eisenhower, Kissinger seemed to have no sympathy for the restraints imposed upon statesmen — especially those peculiar to a democracy. "Relative achievements," he proclaimed near the end of Eisenhower's second term, "are small comfort in the present world. Our period offers no prizes for having done rather well."⁹

Eisenhower's relative achievements did not satisfy Kissinger. He viewed the Eisenhower years as years of decline, lacking in creativity and based upon antiquated ideas. By relying almost exclusively on the nuclear deterrent — "massive retaliation" in the words of John Foster Dulles — the United States had become vulnerable to the Soviet Union's strategy of ambiguity. By posing less than absolute threats, the Soviet Union paralyzed the American will to react to threats aimed at upsetting the global equilibrium.

What Kissinger neglects in his assessment of Eisenhower is a recognition of both the economic and psychological constraints Eisenhower confronted. Eisenhower was concerned, above all, with the internal cost of the Cold War. Unrestrained military spending, he believed, ran the risk of altering the very nature of American society. The excessive costs involved in defending the world from communism might lead Americans to revert to a form of isolationism. Eisenhower sought the maximum possible deterrence of communism at the minimum possible cost in order to keep

6. *Ibid.*, p. 329.

7. Alan K. Henrikson, "The Moralist as Geopolitician," 5 *Fletcher Forum* (Summer 1981): 391.

8. Kissinger, *Restored*, p. 187.

9. Henry A. Kissinger, *The Necessity for Choice: Prospects of American Foreign Policy*, (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1961), pp. 1-2.

America involved in the world without damaging the domestic fiber of the nation.¹⁰ In this regard, Eisenhower achieved considerable success.

Eisenhower's success can be attributed primarily to his recognition of American limitations — a recognition that Kissinger spoke of in theory but ignored in practice. In his study of early 19th century diplomacy, Kissinger was impressed with the statesman's freedom of action. In Kissinger's final assessment, Austria's success was "the work of its Foreign Minister" and Great Britain's success was "due to the efforts of a solitary individual."¹¹ American statesmen who attempt to work around the restraints imposed by democracy may achieve some quick diplomatic victories, but no enduring structure can be raised in ignorance of the ground on which it rests. "The process of coming to grips with one's limits," Kissinger admits in his memoirs, "is never easy."¹²

In searching for solutions to American dilemmas, Kissinger lacked the American historical identity necessary to create political strategies which would enjoy wide public support and approval. Kissinger argued that Metternich "in his never-ending battle against revolution went back to the age in which he had been brought up."¹³ Like Metternich, Kissinger saw himself engaged in battle against a revolutionary foe. But he could not go back to the failed doctrines of the post-World War I age in which he had been brought up, for they had brought tragedy and destruction. He could, however, return to the doctrine of an earlier European age — the doctrine of balance of power whose abandonment had been the cause of the tragedies of Kissinger's youth.

The American tradition, by contrast, is not a balance-of-power tradition. This discrepancy between the European balance-of-power tradition and the American tradition of idealism emerges clearly in Kissinger's scholarly meanderings. Although much of Kissinger's early criticism lacks an understanding of the constraints on policymakers, it does reveal his keen grasp of the problems confronting the United States in the nuclear context of international relations. Like his European predecessor Alexis de Tocqueville, Kissinger was at his best in analyzing American weaknesses, describing their symptoms and exploring their causes.

Thus it is to Kissinger the prophet as critic that we turn to discover the statesman's intellectual concerns for Soviet-American relations, arms control and negotiations. As Kissinger contended after eight years of public service, "It is an illusion to believe that leaders gain in profundity while

10. John Lewis Gaddis, *Strategies for Containment: A Critical Appraisal of Postwar American National Security Policy*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), p.133-5, 164.

11. Kissinger, *Restored*, p. 325.

12. Henry A. Kissinger, *White House Years* (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1979), p. 56.

13. Kissinger, *Restored*, p. 9.

they gain experience . . . [the] convictions that leaders have formed before reaching high office are the intellectual capital they will consume as long as they continue in office."¹⁴ To understand Kissinger the statesman, we must first understand Kissinger the prophet.

III. KISSINGER THE CRITICAL PROPHET

Kissinger's world view remained essentially consistent during his fifteen years as a scholar. His central focus lay in his conception of stability as the goal of an international order. This stability, which is not to be confused with a quest for peace, results when a generally accepted legitimacy combines with a balance of forces. Kissinger defines legitimacy as "an international agreement about the nature of workable arrangements and about the permissible aims and methods of foreign policy. It implies the acceptance of the framework of the international order by all major powers, at least to the extent that no state is so dissatisfied that . . . it expresses its dissatisfaction in a revolutionary foreign policy."¹⁵ Thus, relative satisfaction and dissatisfaction are central elements of any stable order.

As Kissinger perceived the world between 1954 and 1968, the conditions for a stable order were nonexistent. The factors that impelled nations to settle disputes within an agreed framework — a belief in the advantages of harmony and a fear of the military consequences of remaining obdurate — seemed irrelevant in the context of nuclear weapons whose very power and destructiveness militated against their use. But if the United States rejected the use of force, Kissinger maintained, the international order would be at the mercy of its most ruthless and irresponsible member — the Soviet Union. The United States was thus confronted by a revolutionary power that rejected the idea of harmony between different social systems in an era made revolutionary by the power of nuclear weapons and the emergence of new nations. In Kissinger's view the United States faced the formidable task of opposing a power determined to overturn the old order while lacking the means of opposition.¹⁶

How well the United States would cope with this challenge depended, Kissinger believed, on the capacity of the nation to transcend peculiarly American attitudes and institutions hindering its ability to act realistically in the international arena. As cited in a 1956 article, the first of these is a penchant for empiricism which leads American policymakers to postpone commitments until all the facts are known. By that time, however, a crisis develops or an opportunity passes. "Our policy is therefore geared

14. Kissinger, *White House Years*, p. 54.

15. Kissinger, *Restored*, p. 1.

16. Kissinger, *Nuclear*, pp. 4-5.

to dealing with emergencies; it finds difficulty in developing the long range program that might forestall them."¹⁷ By insisting on factual certainty, the United States becomes vulnerable to Soviet maneuvers in two ways: first, every Soviet change of heart is believed until proven false by a new act of aggression, and secondly, the United States finds it difficult to adjust its tactics to new threats. Instead, the United States prefers to operate within the bounds of the response to a previous threat — a known response. "Our empiricism," lamented Kissinger, "dooms us to an essentially reactive policy that improvises a counter to every Soviet move, while the Soviet emphasis on theory gives them the certainty to act, to manoeuvre, and run risks."¹⁸

The second attitude that the United States needed to overcome, in Kissinger's view, was a reckless enthusiasm resulting from the lack of a tragic experience. The American domestic experience of hardship overcome through ingenuity and persistence led Americans to doubt that the penalty for miscalculation in the nuclear age could be a national catastrophe. The United States was also plagued by a reluctance to think in terms of power. As a nation, Kissinger argued, the United States regards power as inherently evil. We want nations to admire us and we hope to succeed not because we are strong but because our ideals are the most persuasive. But to achieve any positive goals, an equilibrium of power must be maintained. "While we should never give up our principles," Kissinger warned, "we must also realize that we cannot maintain our principles unless we survive."¹⁹ Kissinger could think clearly in terms of power, but his idea that the highest principle is survival leaves much to be desired for a nation motivated by idealism. Kissinger's pessimism repugned his desire to build a positive world order.

Lastly, according to Kissinger the United States needed to abandon its notion of peace as the normal pattern of relations among states and as a goal to be achieved. Rather, peace was "the expression of certain conditions and power relationships" — a fringe benefit of the pursuit of a realistic balance of power policy.²⁰

Perhaps even more imposing to Kissinger than these American attitudes was the deadweight of the American bureaucracy. Kissinger's greatest consistency as an academic and as a statesman was his aversion to bureaucracy. He believed that bureaucracy led to stagnation of policy and distorted its essentially contingent nature. The success of a foreign policy, Kissinger argued,

17. Henry A. Kissinger, "Reflections on American Diplomacy," 35 *Foreign Affairs* (October 1956): 38.

18. *Ibid.*, p. 40.

19. *Ibid.*, p. 42.

20. *Ibid.*, p. 43.

. . . depends on the correctness of an estimate which is in part conjectural. The essence of bureaucracy is its quest for safety; its success is calculability. Profound policy thrives on perpetual creation, on a constant redefinition of goals. Good administration thrives on routine . . . the concern with technical problems in foreign affairs leads to a standard which evaluates by mistakes avoided rather than by goals achieved.²¹

The United States government was particularly prone to bureaucratic stagnation because of its "business" character, high level of specialization, belief in the value of group effort and the psychological bias of people in organizations to be popular rather than bold. While Kissinger conceded that "most contemporary problems are so complex that the interaction of several minds is necessary for a full consideration," he maintained that policy arrived at through the consensus of a committee fragments policy into a series of ad hoc decisions "which make it difficult to achieve a positive sense of direction."²²

The end result of bureaucratization was a vicious circle where the lack of a framework of purpose made each problem seem like an isolated and unique case, while increasing fragmentation made it more difficult to act consistently and purposefully. Bureaucratization offered Kissinger an explanation of "why American policy has displayed such a combination of abstractness and rigidity. The method of arriving at decisions places a greater premium on form over substance."²³ Kissinger's emphasis on the role of the individual later revealed itself in the structure of the policymaking procedures of the Nixon Administration.

In his critique of the American bureaucracy, Kissinger failed to recognize three significant facts. First, the Soviets also suffer from an enormous bureaucracy, and the Soviet mind is perhaps even more prone to stagnant bureaucracy than the American mind. Second, he forgot the inverse proposition to his lack of a framework. By attempting to fit all events and issues into a single framework, the distinctive qualities of each event and issue tended to be overlooked (an ironic result coming from the statesman of nuance). Third, the limited capacity of one man to grasp the details of multifaceted events occurring simultaneously throughout the world augurs against an individualistic approach.

What emerges then from Kissinger's penetrating critique of American foreign policy is more than a sense of American frailties, but also a sense of Kissinger's political vision. Through his consciousness of the danger

21. Kissinger, *Restored*, pp. 326-27; Kissinger, *Necessity*, pp. 344-45.

22. Kissinger, *Necessity*, p. 344.

23. *Ibid.*

of nuclear weapons and in his willingness to subordinate ethics and justice to power politics, Kissinger reveals an extremely pessimistic view of history.

Despite this pessimism, Kissinger believed that the United States needed to define "positive goals" and to develop concepts and theories that would give it confidence to act. With these positive goals in mind, Kissinger, perhaps more than any other individual in 20th century American diplomacy, was determined to influence events and to fulfill personal goals. His disdain for bureaucracy and his corresponding interest in the creative capacity of the individual support his belief that individuals with vision can alter the course of history. Kissinger maintained that his advice — to purge American foreign policy of its illusions, to recognize limits imposed by nuclear weapons and to pursue a conceptual foreign policy without bureaucratic constraints — could help the United States achieve positive goals in its international relations. Precisely what these goals were, he did not say. As a scholar Kissinger could tell the United States what path to follow, but he could not describe what he hoped to find at the end of the journey other than a hazy notion of stability based on an equilibrium of power. He could, however, describe the danger that lurked along the path — the evil and ambiguous power of the Soviet Union.

In the eyes of Kissinger the scholar, the Soviet Union was a state bent on the destruction of the existing framework and the establishment of a new order antithetical to American beliefs. The threat posed to status quo nations like the United States — nations seeking tranquility and the continuation of the old order — was in Kissinger's words, "a fearful challenge." The status quo powers faced "a profound psychological disadvantage" vis-à-vis the Soviets because of the communists' "greater moral toughness" and "greater readiness to run risks." Moreover, the Soviet leaders analyzed the world with ruthless objectivity and conceptualized the world with more subtlety than Western leaders.²⁴

Kissinger could hardly constrain his admiration for Soviet foreign policy, especially for its theoretical foundations. "Marxist-Leninist theory is not considered an abstract philosophical exercise in Soviet countries, but the prerequisite to effective action."²⁵ Although presented as scientific and inflexible, Soviet tactics actually are highly flexible. Thus, the Soviets have the qualities that Kissinger saw lacking in the United States — flexible tactics related to a solid conceptual framework. Not only does the Soviet Union prosper from a psychological advantage stemming from the absence of self-restraint and the theoretical grounding of its policy, but

24. Kissinger, *Nuclear*, pp. 319, 335.

25. *Ibid.*, p. 324.

it also prospers from the psychological disadvantages of the status quo states.

Returning to his critique of American attitudes that impede the conduct of American foreign policy, Kissinger revealed how each of these attitudes played into the Soviets' strategy of ambiguity. American empiricism teaches that forcible resistance should be employed only against unquestionably overt aggression. By graduating their moves, however, the Soviet leaders could overturn the equilibrium by almost imperceptible degrees. When the moves are added up and the facts are in, it would usually be, Kissinger believed, "too late."

The American reluctance to think in terms of power and the persistence in the notion of peace as an obtainable goal allow the Soviets to pursue aggressive acts while masquerading as proponents of peace. Kissinger cited the example of a visit by Bulganin and Khrushchev to India where the Soviet leaders loudly proclaimed their love of peace while they detonated their first hydrogen bomb. The 1956 invasion of Hungary and the 1968 invasion of Czechoslovakia offer other examples of peaceful protestations accompanying aggressive acts. Because the United States seeks tranquility, it places excessive faith in the ability of patience and good will to erase tension and misunderstanding. America seeks "to integrate the revolutionary power into the legitimate framework," but to the revolutionary the legitimate framework is precisely what must be destroyed.²⁶

To substantiate these claims, Kissinger cites a press conference in which Eisenhower related his view of the Soviet leaders and his approach to them:

We are dealing with people who are rather unpredictable, and at times they are just practically inexplicable, so far as we are concerned. So you go along announcing your views about peace in the world, what you are striving to do . . . and then for the rest of it, you meet them from time to time, or your diplomatic representatives do, in order to see whether it is possible to ameliorate the situation . . .²⁷

Such a statement aroused Kissinger's deepest antipathy, for it appears to present an image of American foreign policy in confusion, lacking the sense of direction needed to confront the Soviet Union.

This vagueness, as Kissinger came to appreciate when he held office, could have been deliberate on Eisenhower's part. But Kissinger's use of this statement fits with a common method of argument for Kissinger —

26. *Ibid.*, p. 319.

27. *Ibid.*

exaggeration. Kissinger, the master of nuance as a statesman, dealt in black and white, good and evil, as a critic. By painting the gloomiest possible picture of the United States' position relative to the Soviet Union, Kissinger the scholar set the stage for his most serious criticism of Eisenhower. This criticism centered on Eisenhower's actions surrounding three summit meetings with the Soviets: Geneva in 1955, Camp David in 1959 and the abortive Paris summit of 1960.

If, as Kissinger believed and Soviet theory preached, the relationship between the United States and the Soviet Union was one of inevitable conflict, what would be the role of negotiations — the traditional means of settling conflicts — in a revolutionary era?

IV. NEGOTIATIONS — A MUDDLED PROPHECY

In a traditional order, negotiations served three basic functions: formulating agreements, making concessions to perpetuate the international system and persuading by giving others plausible reasons for settlement.²⁸ Because the purpose of diplomatic negotiations in a stable order is to achieve agreement, each side puts forth its maximum demands which are then considered negotiable. In putting forth minimum demands, a nation would lose its bargaining flexibility. In a traditional order, negotiations seek concrete goals — to adjust differences between nations, not to debate the structure of the international order.

If, however, the order is revolutionary, the purpose of negotiations is to demonstrate the impossibility of agreement. In a revolutionary order, a major objective for both negotiating parties is to influence and gain support among nonaligned nations. The negotiations, as a result, are more symbolic than concrete — designed to influence world opinion rather than solve disputes. By putting forth maximum demands a nation would appear intransigent and uncommitted to peace. In the revolutionary order, demands thus have a psychological rather than a practical significance.

The tactical manner in which the United States should have negotiated with the Soviet Union depended, then, on one's assessment of the era — whether it was traditional or revolutionary. Kissinger clearly believed that the United States of the 1950s operated in an order made revolutionary by Soviet doctrine which called for the overthrow of the present order and by the revolutionary power of nuclear weapons. "Rather than facilitating settlement, the increasing horror of war has made the process of negotiation more difficult."²⁹ Instead of leading to a universal reconciliation, nuclear

28. *Ibid.*, p. 317.

29. Kissinger, *Necessity*, p. 170.

weapons had served only to perpetuate all disputes. But if the post-war era was revolutionary, America's leaders seemed oblivious to the need for revolutionary tactics.

To Kissinger, Eisenhower's traditional approach to negotiations with the Soviets was particularly unsuited to the revolutionary era. This diplomacy, based on "good faith" and "willingness to come to an agreement" became a handicap when dealing with the Soviets, who lacked both qualities. The Soviets insisted that the basic relationship between themselves and the United States was one of inevitable conflict arising from class struggle. "True" reality to the Soviets resided not in what statesmen said, but in the productive forces they represented. Even if the Soviet leaders acknowledged Eisenhower's sincerity, they would still believe he was powerless to deal with the "objective" economic and social factors that made continuing conflict inevitable. In this context, Eisenhower's tactics of conciliation were self-defeating and appeared to Soviet leaders as "hypocrisy or stupidity, ignorance or propaganda."³⁰

During his presidency, Eisenhower met with the Soviet leaders at Geneva in 1955 and at Camp David in 1959. The Geneva summit, the first meeting of the Soviet and American heads of state since the collapse of wartime cooperation in 1945, sought to assuage fears among America's NATO allies that their countries would become a battlefield in a nuclear war. The Camp David summit of 1959 consisted of private talks between Eisenhower and Khrushchev, primarily over the tense situation in Berlin. Despite Eisenhower's desire for peace, neither summit produced concrete political settlements — only a vague "spirit" emerged. A third summit scheduled for the spring of 1960 subsequently fell apart when the Soviets shot down a U-2 reconnaissance plane.

Kissinger believed that the tools of traditional diplomacy were irrelevant in the revolutionary order. In *Nuclear Weapons and Foreign Policy*, written in 1957, he described a more viable approach:

Diplomats can still meet, but they cannot persuade each other. Instead, diplomatic conferences become elaborate stage plays which seek to influence and win over public opinion in other nations; their purpose is less the settlement of disputes than the definition of issues for which to contend. They are less a forum for negotiation than a platform for propaganda.³¹

This appreciation for the symbolic underscores Kissinger's understanding of the requirements of negotiations in a revolutionary order. Kissinger

30. Kissinger, *Nuclear*, p. 327.

31. *Ibid.*, p. 318.

would argue that Eisenhower, while committed to the *form* of symbolic negotiations, never understood that such an approach could not achieve the traditional goals of diplomacy. Quoted in 1960, Eisenhower reveals his faith in the symbolic form:

Our many post-war conferences . . . have been characterized by too much attention to detail, by an effort to work on specific problems rather than to establish the spirit and the attitude in which we shall approach them.³²

Eisenhower's aversion to diplomatic detail seemed to conform with Kissinger's assessment of past American diplomacy, which he characterized as being too legalistic. Echoing George Kennan, Kissinger wrote, "our positions have usually been worked out with great attention to their legal content, with special emphasis on the step-by-step approach of traditional diplomacy . . . But the world is not moved by legalistic phrases, at least not in a revolutionary period."³³

Three years after Kissinger argued in *Nuclear Weapons and Foreign Policy* that "the major weakness of United States diplomacy has been the insufficient attention given to the symbolic aspect of foreign policy,"³⁴ he reversed his position. Now, he argued, in *The Necessity for Choice*, that "we must learn to distinguish form and substance . . . it should be the responsibility of our statesmen to make clear that, while we are always ready to negotiate, the negotiations must be SERIOUS, DETAILED, and SPECIFIC."³⁵ As the 1960s began, Kissinger proclaimed that there was no role for symbolic negotiations. But, in practice, Kissinger would later see the value of combining the symbolic with the concrete.

Kissinger's critique of the Geneva summit helps clarify this reversal. Before Kissinger wrote *Nuclear Weapons and Foreign Policy*, Eisenhower had been to Geneva. Kissinger used the Geneva summit to illustrate how the United States, by failing to cope adequately with the psychological and symbolic aspects of negotiations, had allowed the Soviet leaders to use these factors against the United States. The Geneva summit directed the world's attention "toward the horror of nuclear weapons, but not toward the danger of Soviet aggression which would unleash them."³⁶ Because Eisenhower viewed negotiations as inherently valuable while the Soviet leaders saw them as being valuable only when they served a specific purpose, the Soviets could choose to negotiate only when they desired a

32. Henry A. Kissinger, "The Next Summit Meeting," *Harper's*, December 1960, p.63.

33. Kissinger, *Nuclear*, pp. 337-38.

34. *Ibid.*, p. 337.

35. Kissinger, *Necessity*, p. 188.

36. Kissinger, *Nuclear*, p. 338.

relaxation of tensions, to soften the blow of the 1956 Hungarian invasion or the 1955 Egyptian arms deal. Although Eisenhower apparently understood that negotiations were symbolic, he did not foresee how they could be symbolically used against him. He failed to see how his famous smile could be used by the Soviets to relax tensions while they aggressively tried to shift the balance of power.

Writing in 1960, Kissinger again used the example of the Geneva summit. But this time he used it not to reveal the necessity for approaching negotiations symbolically, but to reveal the necessity for negotiating seriously, specifically and in detail about concrete programs. What had developed at Geneva, much to Kissinger's chagrin, was the conviction that the Cold War was due largely to personal mistrust — mistrust Eisenhower removed with his smile. Because the problem appeared to be solved so simply, the ancillary conviction developed "that international problems can be settled simply or dramatically."³⁷ Both of these convictions conformed with dubious American attitudes toward negotiations: the belief in the efficacy of personal diplomacy and the fact that all problems have a final, definite solution.

Kissinger saw these American attitudes as serious obstacles to successful negotiations with the Soviets since they diverted attention from the real cause of the Cold War, which to Kissinger was clearly Soviet intransigence. "Had the Cold War really resulted from personal distrust or were the causes deeper?" he asked poignantly. "Was the tension caused by the intransigence of the Soviet tone or the intransigence of the Soviet acts?"³⁸ Although he realized that these attitudes were serious obstacles, he also realized he could not overcome them.

Kissinger's initial advocacy of symbolically oriented negotiations met the same fate as his revolutionary ideas about limited nuclear war. Limited nuclear war, he wrote in 1957, should be considered a feasible option.³⁹ In *The Necessity for Choice*, Kissinger was forced to reappraise his earlier ideas because of the durability of established American attitudes. "While it is feasible to design a theoretical model for limited nuclear war, the fact remains that fifteen years after the beginning of the nuclear age no such model has ever won general agreement."⁴⁰ Most Americans believed that a nuclear war, if it came, would have to be unlimited. In a similar way, Kissinger realized that American attitudes prevented the United States from adjusting to the symbolic diplomacy which accompanies a revolutionary order.

Between Geneva and Paris, Kissinger saw enough of the American

37. Kissinger, *Harper's*, p. 60.

38. Kissinger, *Necessity*, p. 183.

39. Kissinger, *Nuclear*, pp. 174-202.

40. Kissinger, *Necessity*, p. 81.

attempts to negotiate symbolically to realize that we were attempting to learn a game the Soviets had already mastered. The Soviets skillfully alternated peace offensives — which earned them world respect, with threats of war — for which they made the United States seem responsible. What made Kissinger alter his approach was not just the Soviets' skillful use of these tactics, but also that "essentially the same pattern of Soviet behavior should time and time again raise discussion about its sincerity or its novelty."⁴¹ The United States was so eager for peace — which seemed the normal pattern for a status quo power — that it did not understand that a revolutionary era offered no peace as Americans traditionally conceived it. There would be no terminal point in our relations with the Soviet Union, no end of conflict where there would be no more need for further negotiations.

Kissinger might have decided that if the United States was to continue negotiating with the Soviet Union, it should negotiate in the concrete, detailed, legalistic manner that it knew best. Although Eisenhower appreciated the symbolic value of summits, he still sought the goals of a traditional international order. Kissinger, therefore, faulted Eisenhower primarily for not understanding the needs of a revolutionary era.

V. NEGOTIATIONS IN PRACTICE: SALT AS A TEST CASE

As he began his career as a statesman, Kissinger favored concrete and specific negotiations, but he also appreciated the symbolic nature of negotiations. In the nuclear era, the appearance of power often carried more value than the reality of power. Negotiations and agreements probably contributed more to the appearance of power than to its reality. Kissinger's ultimate success or failure in his dealings with the Soviet Union depended upon his ability to combine the symbolic and the concrete elements of power.

SALT presents a valuable and fair means of comparing theory and practice. As an example, SALT is valuable because the conduct of the negotiations has been well researched and debated, and fair because SALT involves all of Kissinger's central concerns as a scholar — the role of nuclear weapons in foreign policy, American relations with the Soviet Union and the nature of negotiations in the modern era. Moreover, the arms control issue contains the parallel dichotomy between concreteness and symbolic value that troubled Kissinger in negotiations.

The realities or actual strategic value of a SALT agreement could be at some variance with the appearances of a treaty. Intangible qualities of weapons systems such as accuracy, speed, reliability and vulnerability

41. Kissinger, *Nuclear*, p. 331.

cannot be easily expressed to a public concerned largely with numerical superiority. Kissinger explained after his tenure as a statesman:

The management of a balance of power . . . is a psychological phenomenon; if an equality of power is perceived it will not be tested. Calculations must include potential as well as actual power, not only the possession of power but the will to bring it to bear. Management of the balance requires perseverance, subtlety, not a little courage, and above all an understanding of its requirements.⁴²

What were the requirements of the balance of power in 1968 as Kissinger took over the reins of the National Security Council (NSC) system?

In 1968 two new international developments were of overriding importance: for the first time since the development of nuclear weapons, the Soviet Union had achieved a numerical parity with the United States in strategic missiles. This demanded a new approach to arms control. After all, an equal cannot be treated as an inferior. Faced with another situation like the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962, the Soviets might not back down. In addition, as clashes along the disputed Ussuri River revealed, the era of the "Sino-Soviet bloc" was an era of the past. The Sino-Soviet split offered new possibilities for a creative foreign policy that could use this tension to American advantage.

Simultaneously, the ideological and personal composition of the new Nixon Administration was destined to alter the American perception of the requirements of the balance of power. Richard Nixon possessed a political background particularly conducive to opening a new era of relations with communist powers. Although he had earned his political reputation as an anti-communist, he also understood the benefits of bold new approaches just before election time. Moreover, Nixon's "distrust of the existing bureaucracies" — his feeling that the eastern establishment was against him — made him determined "to conduct foreign policy from the White House."⁴³ That Nixon's NSC Advisor shared this aversion to bureaucracy is well known. That Kissinger saw an opportunity to dominate the foreign policy process from his position in the White House is obvious. And that he seized the opportunity with Machiavellian instinctiveness is revealing — although Kissinger railed against bureaucracies, he knew how to function in and around them. But what must now be asked is what resulted from Kissinger's use of his influence and position in the Nixon Administration?

Initially, Kissinger refined the policy-making process by giving his NSC the central role in the formulation of policy. Two Kissinger innovations

42. Kissinger, *White House Years*, p. 115.

43. *Ibid.*, p. 47.

in the decision-making process helped achieve this control. As issues arose, they would be debated in National Security Study Memoranda (NSSM), prepared by the relevant bureaucracies under the direction of the NSC. After reviewing the study documents, the President would communicate his preference in a National Security Decision Memorandum (NSDM). The implications of these memoranda were clarified by John Newhouse in his study of the SALT negotiations:

Both are written in the White House and signed by the President, which means that only he (and his staff) can assign the issues to be studied and frame the questions to which bureaucracy must respond. Thus the NSSM allows him to monopolize initiative, while the NSDM . . . becomes a kind of executive order. Bureaucrats may appeal a NSDM but only with great difficulty can they undercut it or work around it.⁴⁴

Having achieved success in the concentration of power, Kissinger now faced SALT, an issue that tested not only the White House-centered foreign policy system Nixon and Kissinger developed, but also the conceptually based approach Kissinger sought to initiate. SALT raised endless questions requiring exhaustive analysis. Because it was not a crisis situation but a long term problem it allowed for careful planning and structuring of strategy.

Two interrelated weapons systems confronted Kissinger as he attempted to form a strategic doctrine for the Nixon Administration: the Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) and the Multiple Independently Targetable Re-entry Vehicle (MIRV). ABM's supposedly would defend cities or missile sites from nuclear attack by intercepting and "knocking-out" approaching missiles. MIRVs, in contrast, offered a means of piercing defense systems by inundating an area with warheads on differing trajectories. Kissinger inherited the consequences of the Johnson Administration's crucial decision not to match the major Soviet buildup of strategic forces after the Cuban Missile Crisis. This decision, more than any other, determined the constraints under which Kissinger operated during his eight years in office.

The decisions to build the MIRV and ABM systems were made more as a result of domestic pressures than from conscious strategic planning. Rising anti-military sentiment, a by-product of the Vietnam War, precluded large expenditures for new weapons. MIRVs, however, were relatively inexpensive, and thus offered an easy means of maintaining an equilibrium of offensive capability that could assure destruction of an opponent, thus posing risks that would likely preclude a nuclear exchange. A scaled-down

44. John Newhouse, *Cold Dawn: The Story of SALT* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1973), p. 146.

version of the ABM was developed in response to Congressional pressure. The Soviets had begun to deploy an ABM system around Moscow; for the United States not to react similarly to protect her population seemed immoral to many congressmen.⁴⁵

In making these politically pragmatic decisions, Johnson failed to come to grips with the potential instability that each system engendered. Each system would lead an opponent to doubt his deterrent capability while arousing fears that the other side was preparing for a first strike. MIRV could theoretically penetrate city and missile defenses while ABM could allow the attacking nation to ward off counterattacks. "Metaphorically," Newhouse summarized:

ABM and MIRV may be seen as sides of a coin, each complementing the other; or as the chicken and the egg, each justifying the existence of the other; or as two hot particles in the compression chamber of deterrence, where they agitate the entire SALT process. In fact, ABM and MIRV drive the process by openly shaping some issues, tacitly posing others.⁴⁶

In this we see the dilemma of arms control negotiations — the juxtaposition of openly shaped and debated issues with tacitly posed issues that cannot survive the glare of the public eye.

This dilemma grows out of the larger dilemma of symbolic versus concrete negotiations that Kissinger never resolved as a scholar. In his memoirs, Kissinger claimed that throughout his time in office, Soviet-American relations were characterized by the principle of concreteness.

We would insist that any negotiations between the United States and the Soviet Union deal with specific causes of tensions rather than general atmospherics . . . We would not pretend that good personal relations or sentimental rhetoric would end the tensions of the post-war period. But we were prepared to explore areas of common concern and to make precise agreements based on strict reciprocity.⁴⁷

Even though Kissinger wanted concrete negotiations, he still recognized their symbolic value, especially to the Soviets. "There was a sameness to Soviet conduct in 1969 that left little doubt of their basic preference for form over substance."⁴⁸ The problem facing Kissinger, then, was to convince the Soviets to prefer substance over form. If both parties were not engaged

45. Gaddis, *Strategies*, p. 268; Newhouse, *Cold Dawn*, pp. 64-65.

46. Newhouse, *Cold Dawn*, p. 27.

47. Kissinger, *White House Years*, p. 128.

48. *Ibid.*, p. 146.

on the same level of negotiations, Kissinger had recognized in his 1957 book *Nuclear Weapons and Foreign Policy*, the side that sought the symbolic gains could make the side that sought concrete gains appear to be obstructing the establishment of good relations by demanding more than a smile and a handshake.

Kissinger's solution to the problem of dual roles of negotiations was simply to conduct negotiations on both levels — the symbolic and the concrete — through two different channels. One channel consisted of the official United States negotiating team headed by Gerard C. Smith which met Soviet counterparts alternately in Helsinki and Vienna. Meanwhile, a new "back channel" was established by Kissinger and the Soviet Ambassador Anatoly Dobrynin. Kissinger claimed that,

increasingly the most sensitive business in U.S.- Soviet relations came to be handled between Dobrynin and me. . . . Dobrynin and I began to conduct preliminary negotiations on almost all major issues, he on behalf of the Politburo, I as confidant to Nixon. We would *informally* clarify the basic purposes of our governments and when our talks gave hope of *specific* agreements, the subject was moved to conventional diplomatic channels. If *formal negotiations* there reached a deadlock, the channel would open up again. We developed some procedures to avoid the sort of deadlock that can only be resolved as a test of strength. With the President's permission, I would sometimes sketch our views as my own ideas, stating I was "thinking out loud." Dobrynin would then give me the Kremlin's reaction on the same non-committal basis. Sometimes the procedure was reversed . . . at least inadvertent confrontations were prevented. It was a way to explore the terrain, to avoid major deadlocks. (emphasis added)⁴⁹

Despite Kissinger's admonitions to the contrary, U.S.-Soviet relations during the Nixon Administration came to depend in large part on "good personal relations" between Dobrynin and Kissinger.

The rise of the back channel system as the primary means of conducting superpower relations was not surprising. Rather it was a natural outgrowth of Kissinger's and Nixon's aversion to bureaucracy, Nixon's fear of leaks to the press and Kissinger's belief in the ability of the great statesman to alter the international order. The back channel also proved an effective means of avoiding deadlocks between the various U.S. bureaucracies which had a role in nuclear weapons policy — the Armed Forces, the State

49. *Ibid.*, pp. 138-39.

Department, the Department of Defense, and the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency. Furthermore, the back channel offered a means to avoid the glare of the press and to circumvent Congress. SALT was therefore as much an internal negotiation as a test of foreign diplomacy.

It was precisely these bureaucratic weaknesses that Kissinger hoped to avoid. The bold new departures necessary to achieve a significant arms control agreement could never be achieved, Kissinger believed, with a bureaucracy that above all valued safety, calculability and routine. The traditional American approach to negotiations — in which one specific proposal, agreed to in advance by all relevant governmental departments, was presented to the opponent and either accepted or rejected — was a cumbersome process which usually led to a stalemate. For if the proposal were rejected, the whole arduous process had to be repeated and each separate department had to be satisfied.⁵⁰

The means by which Kissinger evaded this bureaucratic haggling again reflects his central concerns as a scholar. Soviet reluctance to pursue SALT negotiations early in 1969 had given Kissinger the opportunity to conduct a comprehensive interagency study, "a systematic analysis of the strategic implications . . . of all strategic weapons potentially the subject of negotiations."⁵¹ What emerged from this study was a series of "building blocks," comprised of different mixtures of numbers, types, locations, and throw-weights of missiles that seemed compatible with national security. Consequently, rather than a traditional offer of one proposal, a range of options were presented to the Soviets which could be mixed and matched into a mutually agreeable proposal. "We were then in a position to respond flexibly to Soviet ideas without each time having to develop a new U.S. position among ourselves."⁵² Because of the study he had commissioned, Kissinger believed the American negotiating position "would reflect not bureaucratic compromise but careful analysis of consequences and objectives."⁵³ By guiding the government to analyze the implications of nuclear weapons, Kissinger successfully laid the foundation in arms control negotiations for conducting the conceptually based, coherent policy he had written about as a scholar.

This was a significant accomplishment, but it was only the beginning of a long and complex process. After establishing a conceptual basis for arms policy, Kissinger wavered from his conceptual approach. Rather than basing his recommendations on a conception of national interest, Kissinger admitted:

50. Marvin Kalb and Bernard Kalb, *Kissinger*, (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1974), p. 116.

51. Kissinger, *White House Years*, p. 148.

52. *Ibid.*, p. 149.

53. *Ibid.*

I was swayed by bureaucratic and political considerations more than in any other set of decisions in my period in office. Basically, the security advisor ought not to play the game; he should submit to the President his own best judgement of the merits and leave the political and bureaucratic considerations to the President.⁵⁴

Because he was adept at bureaucratic maneuvering, Kissinger became too involved in the tactical aspects of policy and lost his larger strategic perspective in the process. By entering the fray, he sacrificed his ability to stand back and derive coherence from the welter of day-to-day decisions. Here we see the beginning of the end of Kissinger's grand design.

Adept at bureaucratic maneuvering, Kissinger was also masterful as a negotiator. He persuaded others that he sympathized with them and identified with them as historical actors. He understood the vulnerabilities of his opponents and knew how to flatter them. He had a good memory, an impressive intellect and was utterly inexhaustible.⁵⁵ More important for Kissinger's success, however, was his understanding of the elements of negotiation gained as a scholar in his study of the Congress of Vienna. First, negotiations required a balance of mutual concessions. "But how to arrive at this balance is a complex process. The sequence in which concessions are made becomes crucial; it can be aborted if each move has to be defended individually rather than as a part of a mosaic before the reciprocal move is clear."⁵⁶ Thus, secrecy in the early stages of a negotiation was also crucial. Lastly, speed was essential at the critical point of a negotiation "where it will move rapidly to a conclusion or lapse into stagnation. This is when the highest levels of government must engage themselves to overcome bureaucratic inertia."⁵⁷ Kissinger presents some forceful reasoning for conducting negotiations in the back channel. But by working outside the normal channels, new difficulties presented themselves — difficulties Kissinger had not anticipated and could not resolve.

"We paid a price for secrecy," Kissinger admitted in his memoirs, "but the price was 'unavoidable' and the reasons for it overriding."⁵⁸ This logic could be defended in some instances, particularly in regard to the opening to China and in some aspects of arms controls negotiations. But when secrecy becomes the dominant logic in all areas of foreign policy, an

54. *Ibid.*, p. 543.

55. Bruce Mazlish, *Kissinger: The European Mind in American Policy* (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1976), p. 204.

56. Kissinger, *White House Years*, p. 803.

57. *Ibid.*

58. *Ibid.*, p. 763.

administration will inevitably come under attack from those who have been excluded from the foreign policy process.

American bureaucracies might have tolerated a secondary role in the SALT negotiations if they were granted more responsibility in the conduct of regional relations — the area where the real expertise of bureaucracy lies. "Bureaucracy properly used," wrote John Lewis Gaddis in a critique of the Kissinger style, "can monitor disparate and complex events without oversimplification." Bureaucracy is thus "necessary to avoid the distortions inherent in applying global perspectives to local problems . . ."⁵⁹

Within the SALT process itself, the secrecy of the back channel sometimes led to embarrassment and confusion because the formal negotiating team had been completely ignorant of the back channel until late in the negotiations. Issues already agreed upon in the back channel frequently resurfaced in the front channel as the Soviets hoped to commit the United States formally to a better deal than Dobrynin had obtained from Kissinger. The American negotiating team would often jump at a smaller Soviet concession than Kissinger had extracted, thinking they had achieved a major breakthrough. In another instance, the official delegates overtook the back channel, thereby confusing the sequence of the back channel negotiations.⁶⁰ While the Soviets could attempt to take advantage of this two channel system, they too suffered from a lack of a unified negotiating process. Official Soviet negotiators often knew less about Soviet weapons systems than their American counterparts. Confusion and embarrassment existed on both sides, but ultimately did not harm the negotiations in any significant way because of the predominance of the back channel.

Kissinger's two-channel system functioned fairly effectively in making possible an agreement on the politically sensitive and technologically complex issue of arms control. As the SALT talks revealed, the reality of arms control negotiations lies in a careful combination of the symbolic and the concrete.

As Newhouse describes the SALT process, the two sides initially played a rhetorical game; positions were taken, issues raised, and talks conducted with little or no results. This was a symbolic stage of the negotiations — the first act of the "elaborate stage play" — and it took place in the formal front channel in Helsinki or Vienna. Gradually, the talks became more serious as each country began to define its interests more precisely. At this point, the back channel became operative and the most difficult bargaining of the SALT negotiation transpired between Kissinger and

59. Gaddis, *Strategies*, p. 334.

60. Newhouse, *Cold Dawn*, pp. 214-17.

Dobrynin. Agreement in principle between them led to a return to the formal channel where the principles were translated into technological realities. Here the back and front channels merged and then switched roles: the formal channel became more intimate and thus informal as the negotiators worked out the details of an ABM treaty and an Interim Agreement on offensive weapons. The heads of state replaced the back channel and became formal actors at a summit, signing treaties with great aplomb and agreeing on statements of "Basic Principles" to govern U.S.-Soviet relations which could never be enforced.⁶¹

Viewed as an isolated issue on its own merits, SALT was without doubt an American foreign policy success. The basic goal of SALT — to ensure stability by persuading each side to abandon steps that might weaken the other's assured destruction capability — was achieved. Most significantly, SALT constrained weapons in areas where the Soviets were actively developing systems without prohibiting areas of probable American development. Considering the weakness of the American bargaining position arising from the anti-military sentiment generated by Vietnam and the dearth of strategic development under Lyndon Johnson, Kissinger and Nixon fared rather well. The goal of the SALT negotiations was not to maintain or regain American dominance, but on the contrary, to ease the transition from superiority to parity. Gaddis writes, "It was an accommodation to reality, carried out with some skill from an unfavorable position in less than congenial circumstances."⁶²

However, SALT cannot be viewed as an isolated issue. While the basic strategic goals of the negotiations were achieved, the political goals of SALT remained much more elusive. Kissinger believed that arms control negotiations would serve as the foundation for a new structure of U.S.-Soviet relations. "In an interdependent world the actions of major powers are inevitably related," Kissinger wrote in explaining his notion of "linkage," "and have consequences beyond the issue or region immediately concerned . . . To ignore the interconnection of events was to undermine the coherence of all policy."⁶³ SALT, then, was fundamentally related to the Nixon Administration's larger foreign policy conception. It is to this intricate relationship between the strategic and the political, the reality and the appearance, that we must look to evaluate the ultimate success or failure of Kissinger's approach to negotiations, the Soviet Union and the world at large.

61. *Ibid.*, pp. 133-272.

62. Gaddis, *Strategies*, p. 328.

63. Kissinger, *White House Years*, p. 129.

VI. SALT AND THE LARGER WORLD OF KISSINGER THE STATESMAN

Kissinger, writing in 1969, maintained that the "test of the statesman is the permanence of the international structure under stress."⁶⁴ By his own standards, therefore, Kissinger did not achieve great success in his attempt to create a "stable structure of peace." The SALT agreement did not prevent the Soviet Union from tacitly supporting the Arab attack on Israel in 1973, from providing military aid to Marxists in Angola in 1975 or from invading Afghanistan in 1979. Most significantly, SALT did not encourage the Soviets to slow the pace of their nuclear arms development. To the Soviets, SALT did not represent "part of a broader commitment to place relations on a new foundation of restraint, cooperation, and steadily evolving confidence."⁶⁵ Rather it was a detailed and concrete negotiation dealing with the specific problem of nuclear arms control.

Although Kissinger negotiated in a serious and concrete manner, he still hoped to extract symbolic gains from SALT. In the Annual Foreign Policy Report that Kissinger wrote for President Nixon in 1973, he claimed that the SALT agreements were of "historic significance" and that this significance "transcends specific provisions and goes to the heart of the post-war competition between us."⁶⁶ The significance of the SALT agreements, Kissinger argued, was guaranteed "by the fact that they are woven into the fabric of an *emerging new relationship* that makes crisis less likely."⁶⁷ (emphasis added) From this it appears that Kissinger misunderstood the symbolic aspects of SALT. It was not the start of a new era of superpower cooperation where geopolitical challenges such as Vietnam could be settled by the United States and the Soviet Union above or around the nations concerned. Instead, SALT symbolized the first recognition by the major nuclear powers of the dangers of an unrestrained nuclear arms race. Recent events such as the congressional resolution for a nuclear arms freeze and the widespread opposition to nuclear arms in Europe and the United States prove that this recognition had enduring symbolic value.

The lesson of SALT for Kissinger was that arms control was too volatile an issue to be used to extract cooperation from the Soviets in other areas of mutual concern. Thus, arms control and the larger structure of peace known as "détente" were not as intrinsically related as Kissinger believed.⁶⁸

64. Kissinger, *American Foreign Policy*, p. 47.

65. "Fourth Annual Report to the Congress on United States Foreign Policy," in U.S., President, *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States* (Washington, D.C.: Office of the Federal Register, National Archives and Record Service, (1970-1975), Richard M. Nixon, 1973, p. 374.

66. *Ibid.*, p. 373.

67. *Ibid.*, p. 374.

68. Coral Bell, *The Diplomacy of Detente: The Kissinger Era*, (London: Martin Robertson & Co., Ltd., 1977), p. 55.

A relaxation of international tension would be difficult to achieve without arms control, but arms control does not necessarily inspire a relaxation of tensions.

Rather than entangling the Soviet Union in a web of agreements through linkage, Kissinger became caught in his own trap. Americans initially believed Kissinger when he claimed that SALT was of momentous historical significance. Because of its success, SALT became a visible and dramatic symbol and test of the Soviets' willingness to moderate their competition with the United States and to be bound by mutually acceptable rules. Kissinger, in *White House Years*, laments "the tendency of SALT to develop in the minds of many a momentum of its own; I feared, as it turned out correctly — that SALT might have to bear the whole weight of East-West relations."⁶⁹ Kissinger made SALT into something it was not and paid the price for his miscalculation by having to witness the dismantling of his larger strategy of détente with the Soviet Union.

This larger strategy sought to combine "firmness and conciliation . . . a willingness to confront Soviet expansionism and a simultaneous readiness to mark out a cooperative future."⁷⁰ It was basically a variation on the theme of carrot and stick, where the carrot would be economic incentives such as grain and high technology and the stick would be the threat of a renewed arms race, a race the United States could win. In practice, though, American eagerness to trade with the Soviets coupled with Congressional restrictions, overpowered Kissinger's desire to use this tool with discrimination, while anti-military attitudes made it difficult to threaten a buildup of nuclear arms. These trends combined to leave Kissinger with no carrot and no stick.

The essential weakness of Kissinger's strategy was that it was in one sense too complex and in another sense too simple. His complex and conceptually based approach to arms control negotiations, grounded in the assumption that the United States could remain vigilant while seeking peaceful gains, aroused the opposition of conservatives. Simultaneously, his simplistic and outdated approach to geopolitical challenges, grounded in the assumption that all challenges to stability somehow originated in the Soviet Union, led to challenges from liberal critics.

This failing of Kissinger's can best be understood in the context of his remark, mentioned earlier, that "the convictions that leaders have formed before reaching high office are the intellectual capital that they will consume as long as they continue in office."⁷¹ Since the early 1950s, when he taught a seminar on Cold War issues at Harvard, Kissinger's domain as a scholar

69. Kissinger, *White House Years*, p. 549.

70. *Ibid.*, p. 1254.

71. *Ibid.*, p. 54.

revolved around superpower relations. Typical of this era was the notion that the "grey-areas" — the nations of Asia, Africa, Latin America and the Middle East — were either "for" the United States and "against" the Soviet Union or vice versa.⁷² Kissinger's Cold War views on Southeast Asia reveal this political atavism: "A demonstration of American impotence in Asia cannot fail to lessen the credibility of American pledges in other fields. . . . We are no longer fighting in Vietnam only for the Vietnamese; we are fighting for ourselves and for international stability."⁷³

Other areas of international affairs, particularly the problems of developing nations and international economic relations, had interested Kissinger little as a scholar. Kissinger's overriding concern for superpower relations, then, prevented him from understanding the histories, problems and people of smaller countries in their own rights. "In Cambodia," William Shawcross concluded in *Sideshow*, his scathing critique of Kissinger, "the imperatives of a small and vulnerable people were consciously sacrificed to the interests of strategic design. For this reason alone, the design was flawed — sacrifice the parts and what becomes of the whole."⁷⁴ Kissinger's problem in this case was that he did not recognize his limits as a statesman. Instead of confining himself to his area of expertise, he tried to make the whole world his domain. Not even Henry Kissinger was equal to that task.

VII. A STATESMAN'S LIMITS

Although Kissinger involved himself in both the parts and the whole of American foreign policy, he was unable to understand how the parts related to the whole — how the symbolic value of certain decisions or methods of operation related to the concrete ends that he sought. Actions such as the invasion of Cambodia which were designed to sustain American credibility had the exact opposite effect, because Kissinger did not understand the political impact of the invasion on world opinion. Outside the world of superpower relations and strategic doctrine, Kissinger did not understand what forces augmented and what forces detracted from American credibility.

Another issue of symbolic value, that of the methods of conducting foreign policy, lies at the heart of the failure of the Nixon-Kissinger conduct of foreign policy. The "twin-pillar" strategy of firmness and conciliation that Kissinger pursued required a strong president and a

72. Henry A. Kissinger, "Military Policy and Defense of the Grey Areas," 33 *Foreign Affairs*, (April 1955): 416-28.

73. William Shawcross, *Sideshow: Kissinger, Nixon and the Destruction of Cambodia* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1979), p. 87.

74. *Ibid.*, p. 396.

united nation. Kissinger decried the attack on presidential authority from Watergate and the divisiveness that ensued. But it must be asked whether the unity, the "sense of positive purpose," and the "sense of continuity" that Kissinger desired could possibly be achieved through the secretive and individualistic manner of conducting foreign policy that characterized the Nixon Administration.⁷⁵

Institutions lend continuity to policy. By failing to involve the bureaucracies in the formation of policy in a meaningful way, Kissinger doomed his structure to a short life. The National Security Council and the NSSM process were intended to maintain coherence and to give a sense of direction by offering the President "real choices." But most of the significant decisions that Nixon and Kissinger made were not even subjected to the NSSM process. Shawcross noted:

There were no NSSMs to discuss whether Cambodia should be bombed, whether Allende's government should be subverted, whether Kissinger should conduct secret talks with the North Vietnamese, or to plan his first visit to China. Indeed many of those decisions that are most characteristic of the Nixon administration's record in foreign policy were subjected to no formal debate at all.⁷⁶

Of the examples cited by Shawcross, Kissinger's one positive achievement occurred in the area of superpower relations, while his failures all occurred in the area of regional problems.

Finally, the sense of unity Kissinger desired required a sense of moral purpose — at least for the United States. But it was precisely this moral basis of foreign policy that Kissinger had opposed as a scholar in favor of the need to think in terms of power. As a statesman, Kissinger failed to unify the country because he could not invoke a sound moral basis for his policy.

As a scholar and as a statesman, Kissinger maintained his belief that America's first goal was survival by any means necessary. But the United States was not well equipped to pursue a purely pragmatic and self-serving foreign policy. In his scholarly examination of American attitudes, Kissinger was aware of the enduring nature of idealism in the American tradition. But as a statesman, he believed he could lead the United States to accept its role as a nation like all others that must play the balance-of-power game.

75. Henry Kissinger, *Years of Upheaval* (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1982), p. 1031.

76. Shawcross, *Sideshow*, p. 84.

Kissinger's early model for limited nuclear war fell prey to the attitude that any nuclear exchange could only lead to all-out war, and as his early advocacy of symbolic diplomacy shifted to a call for detailed and specific negotiations. Similarly Kissinger, as a statesman, grew to appreciate the uniqueness and the enduring strength of the United States. In 1956 he pictured the United States as a nation restrained by outdated attitudes, while he described the Soviet bloc as presenting a vision of "ruthless strength allied with artful cunning, of a constant readiness to utilize force coupled with the diplomatic skill to secure the fruits of such use."⁷⁷ Over a quarter of a century later, Kissinger argued that "the west is in the fortunate position that its problems — major as they are — almost without exception can be remedied by a new effort of unity, coherence, and will on the part of the democracies. The Soviet Union cannot make this claim; its problems are systematic, structural, and fundamental."⁷⁸

The United States needs values to be able to define its national interest and to be able to make the day-to-day choices that are essentially moral choices. While Kissinger understood the American national interest, he did not understand how to achieve it in a way consistent with American values. As Cambodia proved, values in politics reside in what a nation does, not in the vision it sets for itself as the remote objective of its policy. Because Kissinger lacked an inspiring sense of ideals that could serve as the foundation for a new American foreign policy, he found he was unable to articulate the clear, positive conception of American interests in the world that a new policy required.

"I have tried," Kissinger commented near the end of his years in office, "with what success historians will have to judge — to have an overriding concept."⁷⁹ But what this concept was, he would not say. In an October 1974 interview, James Reston of *The New York Times*, challenged Kissinger to articulate his concept:

When you came to Washington . . . it was said that you had a concept of how to achieve order in the world, and yet . . . since you have been here, the tendency has been to say that you have not defined your concept, but that actually what you have been doing is negotiating pragmatic problems and not really dealing with the concept or making clear the concept. What is the concept?⁸⁰

77. Kissinger, "Grey Areas," p. 424.

78. Henry A. Kissinger, "How to deal with Moscow," *Newsweek*, 29 November, 1982, p. 37.

79. Peter W. Dickson, *Kissinger and the Meaning of History* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 1978), p. 120.

80. Seyom Brown, *The Crisis of Power: An Interpretation of United States Foreign Policy during the Kissinger Years* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1979), p. 9.

Kissinger denied the criticism but did not proceed to delineate any concept.⁸¹ If his concept was a "stable structure of peace," it was certainly too ambiguous; and if it was his idea of "firmness and conciliation," it was certainly too limited to deal with a multipolar world.

Kissinger articulated many major premises concerning the conduct of American foreign policy during his years as an academic. He wrote extensively and developed a sound conceptual knowledge of the requirements for a stable world order, the nature of the Soviet Union, the peculiar problems posed by nuclear weapons and the ability of arms control negotiations to solve some of those problems. As a statesman, Kissinger initially achieved success in these areas of his expertise; SALT and the concomitant relaxation of tension with the Soviet Union, as well as the opening to China, were major accomplishments.

That he was not able to build on this foundation reveals his failure to deal successfully with the symbolic aspects of foreign policy. "SALT increasingly turned into a symbol," Kissinger maintained, "its opponents sought to defeat it independently of the merit of its particular provisions or of the alternatives that were left if it failed."⁸² Kissinger's failure to deal creatively with geopolitical problems — his inability to transcend Cold War notions of credibility in Vietnam, Cambodia, Chile and Angola — led to criticism of his innovative approach to superpower relations. His secretive style and desire to avoid regular bureaucratic channels and government procedures also aroused criticism that came to be directed against his approach to SALT.

Kissinger's key failure was not the secrecy surrounding SALT, but that this secrecy extended to all areas of foreign policy. He tried to counterbalance this secrecy on the tactical level with openness on the conceptual level as manifested in numerous candid speeches and the four annual foreign policy reports presented from 1970 to 1973. It was essential, Kissinger believed, "to educate the American public in the complexity of the world we would have to manage."⁸³

In evaluating Kissinger the statesman, it is important to recognize that he was essentially a conservative. "The Conservative," Kissinger explained, "is effective because of his understanding of the experience of his people . . ."⁸⁴ But Kissinger did not possess an understanding of the experience of the American people, nor did he epitomize the essence of the United States as Metternich had epitomized Austria. Because of his European background and outlook, Kissinger could criticize the United States with

81. Ibid.

82. Kissinger, *Years of Upheaval*, p. 1006.

83. Ibid., p. 981.

84. Kissinger, *Restored*, p. 329.

a valuable objectivity, but he could not formulate a historically based concept to guide American foreign policy.

Kissinger's legacy then is twofold. First, he revealed that successful superpower negotiations involving the sensitive issue of arms control are possible in the modern world. To achieve this success, however, such negotiations must be arrived at through a careful analysis of the implications of each weapons system for nuclear stability, and they must be conducted with flexibility and attention to both their symbolic and concrete roles. Second, in his concern for a conceptual approach to foreign policy and in his inability to articulate this conception, Kissinger revealed the necessity for a new concept to guide American actions in an increasingly multipolar world.

Kissinger's ideas on superpower relations are valuable but incomplete. A new concept for American foreign policy must incorporate Kissinger's ideas on superpower negotiations and arms control with an understanding of the histories, priorities and imperatives of countries in their own right into an awareness of the idealism of the American historical experience.