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“Henry Kissinger and the Angel of Applied History”

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Essay by Sean M. Case, Yale University

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The news alerts declaring the death of former Secretary of State Henry A. Kissinger flashed across my iPhone in a feverish pitch matching my flu-induced fever. I felt utterly speechless—it did not seem real. Kissinger had most recently celebrated his centenary in May. The obituaries and the post-mortems similarly appeared in a feverish pace shortly after his passing. *The New York Times* and the *Washington Post* carried headlines declaring the death of a statesman who shaped the history of the Cold War in the United States and remained a “player on the world stage” until his death.<sup>1</sup> His explicit involvement in world affairs as national security adviser and then secretary of state under the administrations of Richard M. Nixon and Gerald R. Ford, Jr. bore special mention. National security journalist Spencer Ackerman, channeling the spirit of investigative journalist Seymour Hersh’s 1983 *The Price of Power: Kissinger in the Nixon White House*, condemned Kissinger as a “war criminal beloved by America’s ruling class” in an obituary that was celebratory in tone.<sup>2</sup> The Quincy Institute for Responsible Statecraft conducted a symposium debating Kissinger’s legacy of peace or destruction, and *Jacobin Magazine* commissioned essays from prominent historians who condemned Kissinger as the “top strategist of America’s empire of capital.”<sup>3</sup> The divisions over his policy legacy reflected those within international relations (IR) theory. While Kissinger was often hailed or condemned as a foreign policy realist and a consummate practitioner of nineteenth-century *realpolitik* in the twentieth century, recent intellectual trends sought to shift his theoretical position. Diplomatic historian Thomas Otte exhorted Kissinger as the “ultimate realist,” yet other academics sought to label him as an “idealist” or even a “moralist.”<sup>4</sup> On the other hand, contemporary international relations realists, working in transatlantic

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<sup>1</sup> David E. Singer, “Henry Kissinger Is Dead at 100; Shaped the Nation’s Cold War History,” *The New York Times*, 29 November 2023; Thomas W. Lippman, “Henry Kissinger, Who Shaped World Affairs under Two Presidents, Dies at 100,” *The Washington Post*, 29 November 2023; and Peter Baker, “Kissinger: A Player on the World Stage Until the Very End,” *The New York Times*, 30 November 2023.

<sup>2</sup> Spencer Ackerman, “Henry Kissinger, War Criminal Beloved by America’s Ruling Class, Finally Dies,” *Rolling Stone Magazine*, 29 November 2023 and Spencer Ackerman, “My Kissinger Obit for ‘Rolling Stone,’” *Ghost*, 30 November 2023. For Hersh’s earlier scathing response to the first two volumes of Kissinger’s memoirs, see *The Price of Power: Kissinger in the Nixon White House* (New York: Touchstone, 1984).

<sup>3</sup> Andrew Bacevich, et al., “Symposium: Peace or Destruction—What Was Kissinger’s Impact?” *Responsible Statecraft*, The Quincy Institute for Responsible Statecraft, 1 December 2023; and René Rojas, Bhaskar Sunkara, and Jonah Walters, eds., *The Good Die Young: The Verdict on Henry Kissinger*, introduction by Greg Grandin, (New York: *Jacobin Magazine*/Verso Books, 2024), 4.

<sup>4</sup> T. G. Otte, “Kissinger: The Ultimate Realist,” *Engelsberg Ideas*, Axel and Margaret Ax:son Johnson Foundation, 12 December 2023. Kissinger’s official biographer Niall Ferguson placed Kissinger as an adherent to Enlightenment philosopher Immanuel Kant’s theory of ethics while historians John Bew and Francis J. Gavin argue that his thought aligned with the moral philosophies Reinhold Niebuhr and Hans Morgenthau. All three based their observations on Kissinger’s undergraduate thesis. See Niall Ferguson, *Kissinger, 1923–1968: The Idealist* (New York: Penguin, 2015) and John Bew and Francis J. Gavin, “Foreword” to Henry A. Kissinger, *The Meaning of History: Reflections on Spengler, Toynbee and Kant* (Stockholm: Bokförlaget Stolpe, 2022).

solidarity, rejected him as an “occasional realist” who prolonged and expanded conflict in Southeast Asia and destabilized Latin America, thus demonstrating how power politics had corrupted him and his strategic outlook.<sup>5</sup>

These obituaries and memorials collectively omit one of Kissinger’s most enduring policy legacies: his self-perception as a historian, which was bolstered by the same perception from his friends, colleagues, and students. He is thoroughly woven into the warp and weft of both how applied history is understood and taught. Due to his nearly 60 years in official and unofficial government service, Kissinger appeared to both exist within and outside of time. How apt for an individual who was thought of as a statesman *and* a historian, an image which Kissinger had cultivated ever since the completion of his undergraduate thesis *The Meaning of History: Reflections on Spengler, Toynbee and Kant* at Harvard University in 1950.<sup>6</sup> His 1957 monograph *A World Restored: Metternich, Castlereagh and the Problems of Peace*, which was based upon his 1954 doctoral dissertation, and “The White Revolutionary: Reflections on Bismarck,” his 1968 biographical sketch of the Prussian statesman Otto von Bismarck, further cemented him as a historically oriented thinker.<sup>7</sup> Rather than subscribing to the policy consensus that the threat of nuclear weapons in the 1950s ushered in a new paradigm, Kissinger believed their existence highlighted deficiencies within policymakers’ historical knowledge.<sup>8</sup> He fluidly moved between the disciplines of history, political science, and philosophy in order to show how nineteenth-century concerns directly correlated with twentieth-century anxieties. His identity as a historian raises the following questions: Why did Kissinger consider himself to be a historian? How did he employ history? What did he believe was the purpose of historical inquiry? A consideration of him as a philosopher of history or a historian demonstrates the far more pernicious aspect of his historical thinking: history-as-analogy. This method of thinking divorced national histories from their contexts and mapped them onto other states and contexts. Kissinger’s privileging of historical analogy ultimately transformed history from an examination of the past to a strategic resource to be mined for executive benefit.

Historians have debated the “meaning of Kissinger” since the 1970s, creating what one historian referred to as “Kissingerology” and another to the “Kissinger Wars.”<sup>9</sup> The controversial statesman’s role in international affairs invited multiple interpretations that often fell into two polarized camps. In *The Trial of Henry Kissinger*, journalist and writer Christopher Hitchens accused Kissinger of being a war criminal because of his willful ignorance of human rights and his enabling of atrocities in Cambodia, Chile, and Bangladesh; he was not alone in his assessment.<sup>10</sup> Foreign affairs journalist Robert D. Kaplan, on the other hand, argued that history

<sup>5</sup> For the Realist rejection of Kissinger, see Michael Desch and Stephen Walt in “Symposium: Peace or Destruction—What Was Kissinger’s Impact?”; Patrick Porter, “The Man Who Loved Power,” *The Critic*, 30 November 2023; and Justin Logan, “Henry Kissinger as ‘The Man Who Loved Power,’” *Cato at Liberty*, The Cato Institute, 4 December 2023.

<sup>6</sup> Henry A. Kissinger, *The Meaning of History: Reflections on Spengler, Toynbee and Kant* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard, 1950).

<sup>7</sup> See Henry A. Kissinger, *A World Restored: Metternich, Castlereagh and the Problems of Peace, 1812–1822* (Gloucester, MA: Houghton Mifflin, first ed. 1957, second ed. 1973) and “The White Revolutionary: Reflections on Bismarck,” *Daedalus* 97.3 (1968).

<sup>8</sup> See John G. Stoessinger, *Henry Kissinger: The Anguish of Power* (New York: Norton, 1976), 3, 9. In the transition from dissertation to first book, the title changed from “Peace, Legitimacy, and Equilibrium: A Study of the Statesmanship of Castlereagh and Metternich” to *A World Restored: Metternich, Castlereagh and the Problems of Peace*. The change highlighted Kissinger’s shifting emphasis from an exclusive academic readership to an appeal to policymakers and an informed public.

<sup>9</sup> See Jussi M. Hanhimäki, “‘Dr. Kissinger’ or ‘Mr. Henry’? Kissingerology, Thirty Years and Counting,” *Diplomatic History* 27.5 (2003): 637–676 and Barbara Keys, “The Kissinger Wars,” *Process: A Blog for American History*, November 2016.

<sup>10</sup> See Christopher Hitchens, *The Trial of Henry Kissinger* (New York: Verso, 2001) and the more recent 2021 re-release from Atlantic Books. Gary J. Bass’s *The Blood Telegram: Nixon, Kissinger, and a Forgotten Genocide* (New York: Vintage, 2014) criticized the Nixon White House’s policy toward Bangladesh during the Bangladeshi 1971 war for independence from Pakistan. Greg Grandin more recently held Kissinger responsible for the current War on Terror in *Kissinger’s Shadow: The Long Reach of America’s Most Controversial Statesman* (New York: Picador, 2016).

would ultimately exonerate Kissinger as a misunderstood defender of the international system.<sup>11</sup> Going further than Kaplan had in defending Kissinger, historian Niall Ferguson used the first volume of his biography, *Kissinger, 1923–1968: The Idealist* to dismantle what he perceived as myths concerning Kissinger, whom he considered to be a friend. Primarily addressing Hitchens’s charges of war crimes, Ferguson argued that a double standard existed between Kissinger and his colleagues in the federal service, particularly Kissinger’s predecessor as secretary of state, John Foster Dulles.<sup>12</sup> He subsequently praised Kissinger for introducing the insight that “states and statesmen act on the behalf of their own historical self-understanding,” which foreclosed any future criticisms of policy.<sup>13</sup> Kissinger’s personal view of himself as a “historian more than as a statesman” led historian William T. Weber in 1978 to seek the intersections between Kissinger’s historical scholarship and his policies.<sup>14</sup> Yet the sheer breadth and depth of Kissingerology paid scant attention to Weber’s line of inquiry until the adoption of “applied history” as a mode of inquiry and advising in the first decade of the twenty-first century.

Ferguson’s assessment coincided with his then-recent institutional project at Harvard University’s Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs. Nearly 30 years after Kissinger left the White House in his position as secretary of state in 1977, political scientist Graham Allison and Ferguson published their 2015 “Applied History Manifesto,” calling for the creation of a “White House Council of Historical Advisers,” which, in turn, led to the creation of Harvard’s Applied History Project. The impetus for their proposal stemmed from Ferguson’s recent biographical treatment of the former secretary of state. Over the course of his decade-long research into Kissinger’s life, Ferguson discovered a purported “history deficit” within US foreign policy. He and Allison endorsed Kissinger’s judgment that policymakers knew “almost nothing not just of other countries’ pasts but also of their own. Worse, they often do not see what is wrong with their ignorance.”<sup>15</sup> Four decades after Kissinger’s previous appearance at Harvard, Allison, in turn, hosted a discussion with Kissinger in 2012. In that forum, Kissinger recommended history and philosophy as the essential disciplines for a career in foreign policy. Allison and Ferguson ultimately judged Kissinger as an applied historian *par excellence* for his use of historical analogies as he invoked a usable past for the Cold War era. Ferguson’s proposed two-volume biography of Kissinger was thus meant to enable both the policymaker and the private citizen to understand the “meaning of Kissinger.”<sup>16</sup>

Johns Hopkins University also staked a claim to Kissinger’s meaning and legacy in 2015. Former New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg endowed his alma mater with the initial funding for the Henry A. Kissinger Center for Global Affairs. By 11 October 2016, matching funds to the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced

<sup>11</sup> For Kaplan’s defenses of Kissinger, see Robert D. Kaplan, “Kissinger, Metternich, and Realism,” *The Atlantic Monthly*, June 1999 and “The Statesman in Defense of Kissinger,” *The Atlantic Monthly*, May 2013.

<sup>12</sup> Niall Ferguson, *Kissinger, 1923-1968: The Idealist* (New York: Penguin, 2015), 11. See the H-Diplo roundtable at [https://networks.h-net.org/system/files/contributed-files/roundtable-xviii-3\\_1.pdf](https://networks.h-net.org/system/files/contributed-files/roundtable-xviii-3_1.pdf).

<sup>13</sup> Ferguson, *The Idealist*, 26. Ferguson’s treatment of Kissinger is a far cry from the developing twenty-first century biographical consensus. Jussi Hanhimäki, in a similar fashion as Ferguson, argued for the importance of historical context when examining Kissinger’s policy record, especially how he consistently pursued peace. See Hanhimäki, *The Flawed Architect: Henry Kissinger and American Foreign Policy* (New York: Oxford UP, 2004), 489. Jeremi Suri, on the other hand, placed Kissinger in the context of the Jewish diaspora from Nazi rule in Germany, and teased out Kissinger’s antidemocratic principles from the failures of the Weimar Republic. See Suri, *Henry Kissinger and the American Century* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap/Harvard, 2007), 4-6. In one of the most recent biographical studies, Thomas A. Schwartz viewed Kissinger in the context of his fellow Cold Warriors and positioned Kissinger as a remarkable political operator both in and outside of government service. See Schwartz, *Henry Kissinger and American Power: A Political Biography* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2020), 14-15.

<sup>14</sup> William T. Weber, “Kissinger as Historian: A Historiographical Approach to Statesmanship,” *World Affairs* 141.1 (1978): 40-41, *JSTOR*.

<sup>15</sup> Graham Allison, “The Key to Henry Kissinger’s Success,” *The Atlantic*, 27 November 2015; See also and Graham Allison and Niall Ferguson, “Applied History Manifesto: Establish a White House Council of Historical Advisers Now,” Applied History Project, Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, Harvard Kennedy School, October 2016.

<sup>16</sup> Niall Ferguson, “The Meaning of Kissinger: A Realist Reconsidered,” *Foreign Affairs* 94.5 (2015): 134-143.

International Studies totaled more than \$50 million, making Bloomberg's gift, at the time, the largest combined gift in the university's history.<sup>17</sup> "Henry has helped shape our history not only as a statesman but a teacher," Bloomberg declared. "After all, he was a renowned scholar before he became a public official, and throughout his career he has never stopped learning or teaching."<sup>18</sup> The center focuses on the application of history to contemporary international affairs, with ten endowed chairs, including two Bloomberg Distinguished Professorships.<sup>19</sup> In the wake of Kissinger's death, the Kissinger Center hailed him as the "epitome of the scholar-statesman" and stated that it would continue to pursue "his vision for a deep engagement with history to meet the challenges of the future." The Belfer Center, on the other hand and in a similar fashion to the Quincy Institute, focused on Kissinger's "mixed" policy record, acknowledging how his diplomacy with China and within the Middle East decreased conflict while noting his neglect of peace and human rights in Southeast Asia and Latin America.<sup>20</sup> Both centers also praised Kissinger for his historian's eye, a characteristic that bears interrogation.

*Leadership: Six Studies in World Strategy*, Kissinger's most recent and final book served as the culmination of his historical and intellectual thought. It formed a loose trilogy with *A World Restored* (1957) and *Diplomacy* (1994), and encapsulates Kissinger's thinking from *The Meaning of History*, which marked the start of his academic life, to the end of his natural life.<sup>21</sup> *Leadership* most importantly revealed how his thought remained in stasis for 70 years because he continued to view the world according to binary categories. Yet it also demonstrated how his thinking shifted from advising and analyzing to the naked pursuit of his personal power and influence. Kissinger, in *A World Restored*, initially defined diplomacy as the "art of restraining the exercise of power."<sup>22</sup> At the close of the 1950s, he espoused the consensus belief from the late 1940s that the European and thus the international political system stemmed from the Westphalian system of sovereign states. This line of historical reasoning argues the 1648 Treaty of Westphalia, which ended the religiously fueled Thirty Years' War in Europe following the Protestant Reformation, functioned as the purported seventeenth-century origin for the twentieth-century international system.<sup>23</sup> Kissinger, in turn, viewed the balance of power that was institutionalized in Europe at the 1815 Congress of Vienna as analogous to early Cold War. Over the next 27

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<sup>17</sup> Hub staff report, "Johns Hopkins Launches Henry A. Kissinger Center for Global Affairs," *The Hub*, Johns Hopkins University, 11 October 2016.

<sup>18</sup> Hub staff report, "Johns Hopkins Launches Henry A. Kissinger Center for Global Affairs," *The Hub*, Johns Hopkins University, 11 October 2016.

<sup>19</sup> Dennis O'Shea, "New Johns Hopkins Global Affairs Center to Honor Henry Kissinger," *The Hub*, Johns Hopkins University, 9 April 2015.

<sup>20</sup> See "The Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies (SAIS) and the Henry A. Kissinger Center for Global Affairs Mourn the Passing of Dr. Henry Kissinger," The Henry A. Kissinger Center for Global Affairs/JHU SAIS, 30 November 2024, and Meghan L. O'Sullivan, Graham Allison, Rana Mitter, Fredrik Logevall, and Joseph S. Nye, "The Impact of Henry Kissinger," The Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs/Harvard University, 30 November 2024.

<sup>21</sup> See Henry A. Kissinger, *A World Restored: Metternich, Castlereagh and the Problems of Peace, 1812–1822* (Gloucester, MA: Houghton Mifflin, first ed. 1957, second ed. 1973); Kissinger, *Diplomacy* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1994); and Kissinger, *Leadership: Six Studies in World Strategy* (New York: Penguin, 2022).

<sup>22</sup> Kissinger, *A World Restored*, 2.

<sup>23</sup> Leo Gross, an international lawyer and early expert in international relations, popularized the concept of the Westphalian system among Western academics with his "The Peace of Westphalia, 1648–1948," *The American Journal of International Law* 42.1 (1948), 20–41, *JSTOR*. Beginning in the 1990s, political scientists increasingly questioned the veracity of the concept, leading some to label it as a myth. See Stephen D. Krasner, "Compromising Westphalia," *International Security* 20. 3 (1995–1996), 115–151 and Andreas Osiander, "Sovereignty, International Relations, and the Westphalian Myth," *International Organization* 55.2 (2001), 251–287. Historian Brendan Simms most recently argued in favor of the Westphalian model as a means to foster peace in the Middle East. See Simms, "Towards a Westphalia for the Middle East," *Engelsberg Ideas*, 19 June 2020, and, in particular, the rejoinder from Suzanne Maloney, "Dreams of Westphalia Can a Grand Bargain Solve the Middle East's Problems?" *Foreign Affairs* 99.1 (2020), 148–153.

years, his understanding of diplomacy shifted from a system that applied restraint on power to one which entailed personalized negotiations on the individual level.<sup>24</sup>

Kissinger then took his investment in the personal to the hyper-personal in *Leadership*, with his focus on six world leaders whom he had interacted with in his role as secretary of state: former chancellor of Germany Konrad Adenauer; former president of France Charles de Gaulle; former US president and foreign policy mentor Richard Nixon; former president of Egypt Anwar Sadat; former prime minister of Singapore Lee Kuan Yew; and former prime minister of Great Britain Margaret Thatcher. Kissinger had already displayed a penchant for mining his personal history through his three-volume memoir of his government service: *The White House Years*; *Years of Upheaval*; and *Years of Renewal*.<sup>25</sup> Taken as a whole his federal career revealed how he transformed his concept of a usable past derived from nineteenth-century European diplomacy to one that was grounded in his personal experiences as a policymaker. Kissinger's memoirs and other writings frequently displayed declassified and sanitized policy memoranda and/or telephone transcripts. He used them to elaborate on policymaking in a general sense and to establish his authority as scholar-diplomat. Kissinger frequently modified these documents in order to display himself in the most positive light.<sup>26</sup> In his convenient formulation, only statesmen could correctly interpret the past. The inherent danger of his proposal rested in the construction of a highly insulated conception of the past that was grounded in a singular perspective. This perspective could not be questioned because it was the interpretation of an individual's life based upon the unique experience of having lived it. Kissinger long argued that history "teaches by analogy, through the ability to recognize comparable situations."<sup>27</sup> Yet these comparisons could only be teased out and applied by historically informed statesmen, creating a closed feedback loop of individuated historical reasoning. It was not for later generations to judge the decisionmaking of previous generations. A privilege granted by experience, according to Kissinger, enabled statesmen to interpret history for their citizens; he argued that they operated on the public's behalf in order to safeguard a nation-state's respective national interests.<sup>28</sup>

The six individuals who constitute Kissinger's case-studies exemplified the executive and insulated qualities that Kissinger most admired in world leaders. He placed them in the generation of the "Second Thirty Years' War," which began with the First World War in 1914 and ended with the Second World War in 1945. Kissinger viewed these three-decade time blocks as acting as cyclical engines of social transformations: the first Thirty Years' War ushered in secular national sovereignty while the second one instituted international *order* upon the rest of the world.<sup>29</sup> The obscured seventh figure in these case studies was Kissinger himself—he operated as interlocutor of events and narrator of lessons learned. He, after all, also belonged to that generation, and his prior experience as a statesman, in his framing, granted him the unique ability to comment on and investigate these world leaders as they conducted themselves during the Cold War and after. His penchant for historical analogy thus extended from the seventeenth century to the twentieth century, and it

<sup>24</sup> Kissinger, *A World Restored*, 2, 138, 187, and *Diplomacy*, 276. For a particularly insightful and astute deconstruction of the "Westphalia myth," see Claire Vergerio, "Beyond the Nation-State," *Boston Review*, 27 May 2021, <https://www.bostonreview.net/articles/beyond-the-nation-state/>.

<sup>25</sup> See Henry Kissinger, *The White House Years* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1979); *Years of Upheaval* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1982); and *Years of Renewal* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1999). Simon & Schuster reissued all three volumes in 2011.

<sup>26</sup> Barbara Keys focused on Kissinger's investment in the personal in Barbara J. Keys, "Henry Kissinger: The Emotional Statesman," *Diplomatic History* 35. 4 (2011): 587-609; Keys and Claire Yorke, "Personal and Political Emotions in the Mind of the Diplomat," *Political Psychology* 40.6 (2019), 1235-49; and Keys, "The Diplomat's Two Minds: Deconstructing a Foreign Policy Myth," *Diplomatic History* 44.1 (2020), 1-21. The *National Security Archive* also released a trove of documents to depict Kissinger's policy legacy more accurately, including his complicity in foreign atrocities. See "Henry Kissinger: The Declassified Obituary," *National Security Archive*, 29 November 2023, <https://nsarchive.gwu.edu/briefing-book/chile-cold-war-henry-kissinger-indonesia-southern-cone-vietnam/2023-11-29/henry>, and "The Kissinger Telcons: The Story Behind the Story," *National Security Archive*, 13 February 2024, <https://nsarchive.gwu.edu/briefing-book/henry-kissinger/2024-02-13/kissinger-telcons-story-behind-story>.

<sup>27</sup> Henry Kissinger, *Leadership: Six Studies in World Strategy* (New York: Penguin Press, 2022), xvii.

<sup>28</sup> See Kissinger, *A World Restored*, 316-7 and 331-2.

<sup>29</sup> Kissinger, *Leadership*, xix.

placed Europe as the world's unbroken center of modernity for 300 years. Kissinger also transformed his ideal categories of the "stateman" and the "prophet" or "visionary" from *A World Restored* to his investigation into world leaders of the Cold War. He framed international relations and international history as a philosophical debate over the "statesman," who "manipulates reality" through incrementalism, and the "prophet," who "creates reality" through the upheaval of the existing social and political orders. The social and political changes highlighted by this tension between these ideal categories became a central concern for Kissinger's historical thinking.<sup>30</sup> The statesman and the prophet collapsed historical actors and movements into easily digestible categories, simplifying and sacrificing complexity for sake of summary. It paid scant attention to the why and the how of historical events.

History does not teach by analogy. Kissinger consistently argued for the eminence of historical analogy as the guiding form of history. He surmised that history served as the memory of an individual nation-state while analogy described the interactions between nation-states. The domestic and the foreign existed as hermetically sealed separate spheres in his thought.<sup>31</sup> He further ignored the fact that a state is a palimpsest, a continuously revised narrative, and perhaps even a fiction. Although Kissinger demonstrated a facility with biography, his historical analysis was based upon personal concerns and not an appreciation of the past as an alien environment. His focus upon sovereignty as an outgrowth of the Peace of Westphalia promulgated an originalist interpretation that was akin to contemporary concerns with constitutional originalism. Legal historian Jonathan Gienapp astutely observed that historical thinking means knowing how to respect the "assumptions, values, and logics that framed the very different mental universe of those living in a different time and place."<sup>32</sup> More recently, historian Joseph Stieb rejected the prevailing historiographical trend of examining the past as a breeding ground for lessons to learn. He instead argued that history should remain "central to the education of national security professionals not for lesson-learning but for enriching their understanding of the world and themselves while cultivating the wisdom to inform sound decisions."<sup>33</sup> Kissinger bracketed the first half of the twentieth century as the "Second Thirty Years' War," yet we in the twenty-first century find ourselves quickly closing in on the 30-year mark in our current era of endless war (2001-?). History situates us in worlds that are familiar yet alien. It becomes even more necessary and urgent to interrogate how we apply history and historical thinking to decisionmaking. Let us cast a critical eye on the unexpected errors and willful mistakes lest we repeat them. Let us no longer be haunted by ghosts from foreign policies' past and lay those ghosts to rest. Let us now reserve our attention, questions, and criticisms for the institutions and systems that perpetuate Kissinger's ways of thinking and the ideologies that animate them.

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<sup>30</sup> See Henry A. Kissinger, "Domestic Structure and Foreign Policy," *Daedalus* 95.2 (1966): 503-5, 514, 526-7. See also Henry A. Kissinger, "The White Revolutionary: Reflections on Bismarck," *Daedalus* 97.3 (1968): 888-924 for how Bismarck and de Gaulle functioned as "conservative revolutionaries" willing to upend the international system for the national interests of Prussia and France, respectively.

<sup>31</sup> In a surprisingly frank admission near the end of his life, Kissinger disclosed his frustration with being excluded from the Nixon administration's deliberation over domestic policy and the election process. One wonders what purpose it would have served to include a national security adviser on these discussions. This revelation demonstrated a deep and abiding interest in accumulating personal power. See Kissinger, *Leadership*, 130.

<sup>32</sup> Jonathan Gienapp, "Constitutional Originalism and History," *Process: A Blog for American History*, 20 March 2017.

<sup>33</sup> Joseph Stieb, "History Has No Lessons For You: A Warning for Policymakers," *War on the Rocks*, 6 February 2024.

doctoral studies, he served for approximately twelve years in the US Army as an officer with key assignments in Germany, Afghanistan, and the United States Military Academy at West Point. He is interested in the intellectual history of international relations and critical security studies.