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Introduction by Thomas A. Schwartz, Vanderbilt University

**Mario Del Pero. *The Eccentric Realist: Henry Kissinger and the Shaping of American Foreign Policy*.** Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2010. 208 pp. ISBN: 978-0-8014-4759-4 (hardcover, \$24.95).

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Introduction by Thomas A. Schwartz, Vanderbilt University

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Henry Kissinger is still with us. I mean this not only in the corporeal sense, as Richard Nixon's former National Security Adviser and Secretary of State recently just turned 88 years old. More importantly, Kissinger remains a significant presence in the ongoing debates about American foreign policy despite having left office more than 35 years ago. Currently Kissinger is appearing in a variety of media forums to promote his new book, simply titled, *On China*, which offers advice on how to avoid a new Cold War with the new economic giant.<sup>1</sup> He and former Bush Secretary of State James Baker recently co-authored an op-ed offering advice to President Obama about Libya and its implications for American foreign policy.<sup>2</sup> Mario Del Pero begins his book by reminding readers of the first Presidential debate in 2008, when both John McCain and Barack Obama sought to claim the mantle of Kissinger's realism. It was a remarkable moment, as the two men argued over what the octogenarian diplomat advised about Iran and its nuclear program. All of this confirms Priscilla Roberts' observation in this roundtable that Henry Kissinger, "Like Ole Man River despite all criticism – and criticism aplenty there has been – he just keeps rolling along."

Mario Del Pero's short but incisive book offers a new take on Kissinger, exploiting for its sources many of the lengthy but more traditional studies of the diplomacy of this era which have appeared in the last decade.<sup>3</sup> Del Pero develops three central arguments. The first is that Kissingerian realism was not a bold or innovative policy, but a conventional and popular one in the atmosphere of 1968. Del Pero's use of the 2008 election to begin his work is deliberate, as he sees a distinct parallel with the election of 1968. In both cases, he argues, the American electorate had grown tired of the burdens of an unpopular war that seemed to drain the country's economic vitality, and wanted a new approach to foreign affairs. Kissinger's advocacy of a foreign policy based on European-style realism met that need. As Del Pero puts it, "In periods of difficulty, critical introspection, and domestic division, realist and anti-utopian formulas and codes tend to become more popular and acceptable." (p. 5) In effect, Del Pero argues, any President elected in 1968 would have followed many of the policies identified with Kissinger. (Lending support to this is the fact that Hubert Humphrey once remarked that he would have selected Kissinger as his National Security Adviser as well.)

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<sup>1</sup> Henry A. Kissinger, *On China* (New York: Penguin Press, 2011).

<sup>2</sup> Henry A. Kissinger and James A. Baker III, "Grounds for U.S. Military Intervention," *Washington Post*, April 10, 2011.

<sup>3</sup> Among these are Jussi Hanhimäki, *The Flawed Architect: Henry Kissinger and American Foreign Policy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), Jeremi Suri, *Henry Kissinger and the American Century* (Cambridge MA: Harvard university press, 2007), and Robert Dallek, *Nixon and Kissinger: Partners in Power* (New York: HarperCollins, 2007). In the interests of conserving space, I will defer to the extraordinarily comprehensive footnotes in the contribution of Priscilla Roberts in the Roundtable.

The second major argument of Del Pero is that Kissinger was obsessed with the domestic implications and popularity of his policy, and that this was a key reason why he spent so much time cultivating his image with the media. Del Pero contends that previous historians have bought into Kissinger's carefully constructed self-portrait as a diplomat out of the nineteenth century who paid little attention to the domestic politics of his grand strategy and maneuvers. They took too seriously the subject of Kissinger's dissertation and first book and thought he was simply as a modern Metternich.<sup>4</sup> In reality, Del Pero contends that Kissinger was "maniacal" in his attention to the media and to the way his foreign policy was perceived at home. Del Pero remarks that he was "surprised" that Kissinger spent "an inordinate amount of time speaking to journalists and senators." (p.7) This attention to the media helped produce a considerable popularity for the Nixon-Kissinger foreign policy, a popularity that brought the electoral triumph of 1972. Ultimately Del Pero argues that Kissinger misread this popularity as the creation of a new consensus for a realist foreign policy, something which Del Pero contends ran against the deeply rooted American political and cultural traditions of exceptionalism.

Del Pero's third argument is that Kissinger, as well as being obsessive about the media and his domestic audience, was also "maniacal" in his bipolar view of the international system, certain that the paramount consideration of foreign policy was the competition and balance of power with the Soviet Union. Kissinger constructed a détente with the Soviets that was "an attempt to co-manage bipolarism in order to consolidate and uphold it." (p.10) Arguing that multipolarity and the fragmentation of the blocs was the reality of the time, Del Pero ironically concludes that Kissinger's policy floundered on these contradictions and "lacked, ultimately, the necessary dose of realism." Indeed, Del Pero accuses Kissinger of "intellectual sloppiness" in his approach to phenomena like Eurocommunism in Italy and Portugal, rejecting the more nuanced approach advocated by his staff in favor "rigid bipolar models." (p.10)

The commentators emphasize different aspects of Del Pero's work, and have a varying level of enthusiasm for his approach and perhaps more importantly, the subject of his book. They all praise Del Pero for emphasizing the degree to which Kissinger was, as Priscilla Roberts calls him, a "political animal," with an acute desire to promote his foreign policy – and himself – to the domestic audience. David Ryan is the most supportive of Del Pero's approach, endorsing the author's skepticism toward Kissinger's claims to be a realist, and considering the work a "superb deconstruction" of both "Kissingerianism and realism." Ryan accepts Del Pero's contention that Kissinger was less concerned with the practice of a realist diplomacy than he was in a "discourse of realism," an image that was ultimately at odds with the degree to which Kissinger accepted the importance of credibility and American globalism. Priscilla Roberts gives an extraordinarily comprehensive and thorough background on the literature of "Kissingerology," providing a superb bibliographical list of the major works dealing with Kissinger and his policies, as well as the intellectual and political trends they reflected. As one of the foremost historians of the

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<sup>4</sup> Henry A. Kissinger, *A World Restored: Castlereagh, Metternich, and the Restoration of Peace, 1812-1822* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1957).

American foreign policy “Establishment,” Roberts is well-qualified to situate Kissinger’s realism within the intellectual history of that concept and its application to American foreign policy. Roberts makes the important observation that not all realists shared the same views on Kissinger’s approach to détente, with some, like George Kennan, applauding his refusal to meet with the Soviet dissident, Alexander Solzhenitsyn, while others, like Hans Morgenthau, criticized Kissinger for this refusal. Roberts also observes that even though Kissinger’s policies became the subject of criticism from both the right and left wing of American politics, many of his protégés and others strongly influenced by Kissinger would continue to make foreign policy in the decades after Kissinger left office. One need only mention figures like Alexander Haig and Brent Scowcroft, who played important roles in the Reagan and Bush Administrations. It is too simplistic, she argues, for Del Pero to speak of the rejection of Kissinger’s eccentric realism by subsequent American Presidents.

T. Christopher Jespersen begins by praising Del Pero’s book as “deftly crafted and succinct,” and “impressive because of the ease with which he surveys vast sweeps of serious intellectual history and because of his fluid writing.” But ultimately Jespersen finds the book, “unsatisfying,” and he is the most critical of the commentators. Jespersen’s objections seem as much about Kissinger himself as they are about Del Pero’s argument. Frequently citing Christopher Hitchens, whose book and subsequent documentary called for Kissinger to be summoned before an international tribunal, and Seymour Hersh, who made a similar case for Kissinger’s crimes and duplicity, Jespersen sees Del Pero as underplaying Kissinger’s “deviousness, his nastiness, and his ability and desire to justify brutality.” Jespersen even criticizes Del Pero’s title word, “eccentric,” which suggests a “harmless quirkiness,” as being completely inappropriate for a man with a “mean streak” like Kissinger’s. Citing Kissinger’s role in Vietnam policymaking as well as his involvement with the coup against Salvador Allende in Chile, Jespersen concludes that Kissinger’s realism “was far more brutal, savage, and destructive than it was eccentric, and that remains the sad legacy of Henry Kissinger.”

Alessandro Brogi has the advantage of having read Del Pero’s first version of the book in Italian, which possessed a title that emphasized Kissinger’s clash with the neo-conservatives. For a European audience in 2006, when the first edition of the book appeared, mentioning the “neo-cons” was a type of intellectual shorthand for attacking those advisers to George W. Bush who created the mess in Iraq. Brogi takes a somewhat more sympathetic approach to Kissinger’s realism, and disputes Del Pero’s understanding of Kissinger “maniacal bipolarism.” As Brogi makes clear, Del Pero confuses a view of a multipolar international system with an understanding of the political pluralism within the West. Kissinger believed that Western Europe was too weak and divided to stand on its own against the Soviet Union. A fragmented Western Europe, with communist parties active in governments, would tempt the Soviet Union to fish in troubled waters, undermining the stability of détente. Kissinger’s approach, Brogi argues, may have been “overbearing and perhaps misguided,” but it was not as “unrealist” as Del Pero contends. In fact, Brogi notes that Kissinger was not as “maniacally bipolar” or rigid as Del Pero presents. For example, Kissinger was willing to use multilateral measures to shore up the ideological and political unity of the alliance, giving the French and German governments concessions on economic issues in order to bolster the West and preserve the stability of

the balance of power in Europe with the Soviet Union. While on the whole more sympathetic to Kissinger's attempt to "seek domestic legitimization of his foreign policies," Brogi agrees with Del Pero that Kissinger's realist approach faced an uphill struggle with Americans, whether because of Del Pero's view of Americans' "congenital exceptionalism, hegemonic tendencies, and naïveté" or other factors within American political culture.

Struggling myself to complete a longer study of Kissinger's diplomacy, I can attest to the real contribution which Del Pero's work and the critiques presented by this roundtable make in our understanding of Kissinger and his times.<sup>5</sup> Whatever one thinks of Henry Kissinger – and it is clear that he remains a polarizing figure, especially within the academy – his approach to American foreign policy does force Americans to confront some of the fundamental questions involved with defining the national interest and how the United States should use its still unrivalled power. In light of recent events in Libya and the American response to the Arab Spring, it has been fascinating to watch the Barack Obama Administration, originally sworn to its own version of Kissingerian realism, forced to react in ways that may well serve to modify or create a new doctrine of humanitarian intervention. Kissinger and his legacy will remain with us well into the foreseeable future.

### Participants:

**Mario Del Pero** is Associate Professor of US History at the University of Bologna. Among his most recent publications are *Libertà e Impero. Gli Stati Uniti e il Mondo, 1776-2011* [*Empire and Liberty. The United States and the World, 1776-2011*], Rome-Bari: Laterza, 2011 (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.) and *Democrazie. L'Europa meridionale e la fine delle dittature* [Democracies. Southern Europe and the End of Dictatorships], Rome: Le Monnier, 2010 (with Víctor Gavín, Fernando Guirao and Antonio Varsori). He is currently working on a new research project on Three Miles Island and the rise of a transnational anti-nuclear movement. In the Fall of 2011 he will be a Fellow at the Center for the United States and the Cold War of New York University.

**Thomas A. Schwartz** is a Professor of History at Vanderbilt University. He earned his Ph.D. from Harvard University studying under Professor Ernest R. May and Professor Charles S. Maier. He is the author of *America's Germany: John J. McCloy and the Federal Republic of Germany* (1991), *Lyndon Johnson and Europe: In the Shadow of Vietnam* (2003), co-editor of with Matthias Schultze of *The Strained Alliance: U.S.-European Relations from Nixon to Carter*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010. He is currently finishing a biography of former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger entitled *Henry Kissinger and the Dilemmas of American Power*.

**Alessandro Brogi** is Associate Professor of the History of U.S. Foreign Relations, University of Arkansas. He also held positions as Olin Fellow and Lecturer at Yale University, Visiting Professor at Johns Hopkins University – Bologna Center, and, most recently, Fellow at the

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<sup>5</sup> Thomas A. Schwartz, "Henry Kissinger: Realism, Domestic Politics, and the Struggle Against Exceptionalism in American Foreign Policy," *Diplomacy and Statecraft* 22 (March 2011): 121-141.

Nobel Peace Institute in Oslo. His main works are on U.S. relations with France and Italy, and they include *L'Italia e l'egemonia Americana nel Mediterraneo* (1996, finalist for the Acqui Storia Prize, 1997, and the OAH foreign language book prize, 1998), and *A Question of Self-Esteem: The United States and the Cold War Choices in France and Italy, 1944-1958* (2002). His latest book, titled *Confronting America: The Cold War between the United States and the Communists in France and Italy*, is forthcoming in 2011 with the University of North Carolina Press (New Cold War Series).

**T. Christopher Jespersen** is Dean of the School of Arts and Letters at North Georgia College & State University. He is author of *American Images of China, 1931-1949* (Stanford, 1996), which is forthcoming in Chinese from Jiangsu People's Publishing House. He is also editor of *Interviews with George Kennan* (University Press of Mississippi, 2002) and author of articles in *Diplomatic History* and *Pacific Historical Review*, among other journals. He is completing a book titled *Becoming the Redcoats* for Stanford.

Henry Kissinger has been drawing the attention of scholars from both sides of the Atlantic. It is not surprising that through the prism of this internationally dominating figure, who also represented the formation of a transatlantic elite bent on reforming foreign policy-making in the United States, some European scholars have addressed broader questions about American society, politics, and foreign policy.<sup>1</sup> This type of analysis seems particularly urgent, since for the past three decades, transatlantic relations have suffered from erosion, forming a growing “rift,” as even the proponent of the “empire by invitation” thesis, Geir Lundestad, has recently recognized.<sup>2</sup> Italy’s Mario Del Pero has joined the ranks of those who, like Jeremi Suri, have placed Kissinger at the center of a narrative explaining global change and highlighting the importance and interpretations of the “American Century.”<sup>3</sup> But Del Pero’s take on Kissinger as an architect of this global change is far less optimistic than Suri’s.

To the inattentive reader, Del Pero’s approach and arguments may seem Eurocentric. Even more, they may appear as a polemical attack on the exceptionalist assumptions in U.S. foreign policy favoring the neoconservatives’ emergence starting from the late 1970s, and, from the scholarly viewpoint, in this past decade, producing rather distorting accounts on Euro-American relations that have irked Europe’s diplomatic historians.<sup>4</sup> In fact, Del Pero’s analysis is more nuanced than that. Concentration on the Euro-Atlantic dialogue reflects Kissinger’s own focus on consolidating transatlantic ties and modes of thinking. And identifying the permanence of exceptionalist foundations in American foreign policy does help us understand the complexity of U.S. society and world views (in the 1970s and beyond), and in general America’s particular brands of realism (always qualified and redefined by its proponents). Perhaps most important, while Suri has emphasized that at the time Kissinger came to power the transatlantic elite came to be questioned and that transatlantic assumptions were attacked (by both the New Left and the neoconservatives), Del Pero suggests that the transatlantic connection was never symbiotic in the first place, and that the same meliorist, Wilsonian views that informed America’s twentieth century sense of global mission simply lay dormant for a brief period in the aftermath of the Vietnam War.

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<sup>1</sup> See for example Jussi M. Hanhimäki, *The Flawed Architect: Henry Kissinger and American Foreign Policy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), Gerry Argyris Adrianopoulos, *Kissinger and Brzezinski: The NSC and the Struggle for Control of U.S. National Security Policy* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1991), and Alistair Horne, *Kissinger: 1973, the Crucial Year* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2010).

<sup>2</sup> Geir Lundestad, *The United States and Western Europe Since 1945: From “Empire” by Invitation to Transatlantic Drift* (London: Oxford University Press, 2003).

<sup>3</sup> Jeremi Suri, *Henry Kissinger and the American Century* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007).

<sup>4</sup> See for example Robert Kagan, *Of Paradise and Power: America and Europe in the New World Order* (New York: Knopf, 2003), and Walter Russell Mead, *Power, Terror, Peace, and War: America’s Grand Strategy in a World at Risk* (New York: Knopf, 2004).

In its Italian version, the book carried the title *Kissinger e l'ascesa dei neoconservatori*, emphasizing the clash between Kissinger and the neoconservative movement, while the translated version draws the attention to the problems of Kissinger's idiosyncrasies and foreign policy style. Again, only a superficial reading would reduce the book's argument to the problem of Kissinger's eccentricity and narcissism and to the contradictions of an "Americanized" realpolitiker who sacrificed substance to a desire to please the public. In fact, for a diplomat with such titanic ambitions, style and substance, with all their merits and problems, were inextricably linked.

Del Pero illustrates that interconnection by presenting three main arguments: First, that Kissinger's self-assigned role as that of the "no-nonsense hard-nosed" realist teaching a "naïve and immature America the timeless (and indeed European) rules and practices of international politics" (p. 6) was often ostentatious, but fitting with the mood of a country reeling from the ill-fated consequences of the "modernizing crusades" of the 1960s; second, this effort to "tune in" with the public reflected Kissinger's "obsession with the media" and the "domestic repercussion of his words and deeds" (p. 7) – an obsession that contradicts previous accounts describing Kissinger's ineptness or lack of concern with public scrutiny and the domestic consequences of his foreign policy<sup>5</sup>; and third, while ostensibly accepting the objective multipolar evolution of the international system, Kissinger tenaciously worked on preserving the bipolarity of the system -- but by trying to safeguard bipolarism while, through *détente*, "delegitimizing its basic ideological underpinnings," (p. 10) he also undermined the very bipolar discipline he intended to impose on America's allies, especially in Europe, and the flexibility he wanted to instill in the American public's mind.

All these arguments reinforce an emerging analysis among several historians that tempers, qualifies, and even debunks Kissinger's allegedly unadulterated and consistent realism. Del Pero's first two arguments seem to suggest that, in fact, Kissinger did play the role of the European sage imparting cosmopolitanism and realism to a provincial and idealistic nation. But the contradiction lay in his effort to tune in with the mood of the people, and his egocentric conviction that America's departure from exceptionalism and misguided nationalism could become a permanent one. And the more Kissinger tried to instruct, the more he actually exposed his own inconsistency between a realpolitik calibrating means and ends, and his ambition to restore the country's supremacy in global politics. Worst of all (and perhaps remaining too implicit in Del Pero's argument), Kissinger's syncretism between realism and idealism contained a great dose of that exceptionalism and ideological fervor that inspired his neoconservative opponents. While as a realist, Kissinger pointed at the country's limited capabilities, his *détente* policies and their global reach also re-evoked the country's limitless expectations, and reignited the public's propensity for a cold war defined by power as well as ideology. That public inclination backfired on him when *détente* seemingly failed to contain or roll back the communist enemies. The neoconservative resurgence happened not only because a resilient, militant Wilsonianism trumped realism, or because, as early accounts on *détente* argued, the Soviet Union

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<sup>5</sup> See most recently, Dan Caldwell, "The Legitimation of the Nixon-Kissinger Grand Design and Grand Strategy," *Diplomatic History*, vol. 33, n. 4 (September 2009).

remained more ideological than Kissinger thought, but -- perhaps mainly according to Del Pero -- because Kissinger's own self-proclaimed realism contained contradictions of style and substance that ultimately corrupted his design.

Reviews of *The Eccentric Realist* so far have tended to ignore the first part of the book, which analyzes Kissinger's ideas, from his academic years to his access to the highest level in the Nixon administration, against the backdrop of the containment phase in American foreign policy, and of its failures in the 1960s. Indeed, a critical reappraisal of the first two decades of America's Cold War helps Del Pero expose the continuity of American notions of exceptionalism. U.S. cold war liberalism was nationalist and universalist at the same time; it restored confidence in the country's global mission after the discredited isolationism (or rather, appeasement) of the pre-World War II years; it justified high investment in defense and national security, promising permanent growth through fine-tuning; and it responded to a "deep-seated messianic tendency, which recovered and adapted Wilsonian assumptions, in particular the idea that the diffusion of U.S.-inspired market democracy was not only beneficial to the United States and its economy, but also vital to its security" (p. 29). Conservative critics misunderstood containment as justifying equivalence when in fact it aimed to demonstrate Soviet inferiority and to "possibly crystallize the post-World War II asymmetric balance of power" (p. 17). The domestic consensus on containment came under attack after unexpected crises in the 1960s seemingly undid that crystallization: a relative decline vis-à-vis the other Western economies, nuclear proliferation creating multiple centers of power, and, of course, Vietnam, and the crisis of U.S. hegemony with increasingly disenchanted allies all discredited the promise of universal liberalism. The first most vocal assault against such universalism came from the New Left and from "reformed" liberals in Congress, who emphasized multilateralism, empowered international institutions, and a dis-empowered executive. Kissinger's main goal remained that of preventing these "limitationists" from undercutting the country's ability to shape global policies; focusing on this problem, he lowered his guard on his right flank. In fact the Left, new or old, Del Pero reminds us, remained multifaceted, quarreling, and divided. While also diverse, the neoconservatives held strong common ideological denominators, based on militant nationalism, moralist assumptions, and pressure for remilitarization. These convictions better met the country's expectations, or hopes, to restore American Cold War supremacy. But, as the limits rather than the preponderance of American power were for a while most apparent, Kissinger's ability, through realism, to reinvigorate U.S. international leverage and to regulate the Cold War carried the day.

Kissinger's realism, too, was never orthodox or linear. Kissinger's opportunism, "eccentricity," perhaps even set of beliefs deriving from the need to establish a strong transatlantic community, induced him to adapt his realism to the spirit and times of U.S. Cold War political culture. The realist edifice was apparently strong: Kissinger worked on institutionalizing strategic interdependence, rather than pursuing asymmetry vis-à-vis the Soviet Union; this institutionalization was a policy innovation crediting the consolidation of a concert of powers over Manichean confrontation; this design was founded on a certain moral relativism, and it is true that Kissinger opposed a firm Wilsonian principle, the drive to affect other countries' -- especially the main adversaries' -- internal regimes. The ultimate test of his realism could indeed be his distinction between global powers (China or

the Soviet Union) and minor powers (the European allies, Chile, South Africa, etc.), whose internal regimes *had* to be influenced, or, in some cases, preserved in order to maintain a regulated Cold War confrontation. The major adversaries had to be brought into international legitimacy, determined by codes of international (not domestic) conduct, while allies and minor adversaries needed to be harnessed, lest they break that equilibrium and even tempt the Soviets to stray from the balance and interdependence Kissinger so carefully tried to construct. Finally, Kissinger kept rejecting modernization and transformative strategies that, as Odd Arne Westad has best illustrated, were the most consequential premise behind America's global commitments.<sup>6</sup>

The qualifications of Kissinger's realism also abound. His aura as an (academic) outsider of the Cold War liberal consensus was redefined by his actual belonging to the bureaucracy and emphasis on expertise against the superficial goals of politicians. His desire to teach American policy-makers the realities of diplomacy, borrowing from nineteenth century balance of power examples, was characterized first by his reverse desire to fit those old concepts into the Cold War American-driven climate. His pessimism about U.S. decline and the international power system was tempered by an almost Wilsonian optimism about his ability to reshape the international system. His emphasis on interdependence was complemented by his determination to defend American credibility. This determination was apparent not only during Kissinger's days in office, but also during his seemingly arch-realist academic phase, when, in the 1950s, he advocated the possible resort to tactical nuclear warfare apparently as a Clausewitzian method to preserve the diplomacy/force nexus, but in fact, as he later admitted, to stress how the dual atomic monopoly had created a "credibility deficit" allowing the Soviet Union "to partially fill the power gap" (p. 54). Diverging from the realist tenets of George Kennan and Hans Morgenthau, Kissinger, while in power, made decisions based on credibility and prestige, "sacrificing strategic coherence and rigor" (p. 55). Finally, and according to Del Pero above all, Kissinger's realism showed a discrepancy between his ostensible recognition of international multipolarity and his determination to maintain bipolarity. The autonomy of America's European allies was undermined by Kissinger's triangular diplomacy with Moscow and Beijing. Even the opening to China was calculated to reduce U.S. burdens in East Asia and thus to enable Washington to work better on the Eurasian core, preventing Europe's accommodation to a more powerful Soviet Union. To those European allies who saw *détente* as lowering the rigid ideological barriers within Europe – thus opening a dialogue with the Communists in France, Italy, Portugal, or allowing European nations to conduct their own *détente* with the East – Kissinger rebutted that *détente* was "simply another way to manage and discipline bipolarism and not a process designed to bring it to an end" (p. 94). It was a different, "less ideological" way of confronting the Soviet Union.

In assessing this apparent inconsistency Del Pero often seems to confuse multipolarity with genuine political pluralism. Preservation of the bipolar status quo in fact could reflect a realist assessment of Cold War power realities. Kissinger believed that Europe was too

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<sup>6</sup> Odd Arne Westad, *The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

weak and divided to play this game with the Soviet Union by itself. A more independent Europe could indeed have derailed détente. This assumption was overbearing and perhaps misguided, but nevertheless not as “un-realist” as Del Pero portrays it. Limiting ideological flexibility in allied countries, while adopting it toward the Soviet Union was not necessarily inconsistent with realism either. The Cold War realist, a believer in the international status quo, may have actually found the ultimate test of his realpolitik when he utilized multilateral methods to achieve his goal of international bipolarity, and, one must add, ideological cohesion in the alliance he intended to control. For example, during the formative years of the G-7 group, Kissinger found an auspicious cooperation with French president Valéry Giscard d’Estaing and with German chancellor Helmut Schmidt, aimed not only at redesigning Europe’s economy along neo-liberalist lines, but also, at isolating the welfare-oriented leaders wanting to make the ideological flexibility of détente truly global. “If we will work with [Schmidt] on the economy,” Kissinger argued at a National Security meeting in May 1975, “he will support us on everything else. *The trick in the world now is to use economics to build a world political structure.*”<sup>7</sup> So, what do we have here, a determined bipolarist ignoring the will of powerful or enlightened allies, or a realpolitiker utilizing multilateral schemes to preserve the balance of power he believed would keep global stability? The latter seems more correct. Kissinger’s own nineteenth century models, from Metternich to Bismarck, had similarly adopted multilateral methods to obtain strictly defined ideological goals.

Del Pero is more convincing at proving what many American scholars may find controversial: Kissinger’s own wavering between realist and credibility options in the end struck domestic public opinion as inconsistent, and failed to obtain his stated goal of transcending the limits of American power. Neoconservatives, perceptively but also conveniently, decried Kissinger’s “un-Americaness,” his seeming lassitude with European allies who were prone to “succumb to a sulky neutralism” (p. 135) (which was probably the most unfair of the charges), and also for his moral relativism, his reliance on nuclear peace (also morally repugnant, not so much because of prospects of destruction, but because it placed the United States in the hands of a total enemy). Del Pero, in the same vein as Seymour Lipset’s masterful account on American exceptionalism,<sup>8</sup> insists on the liberal Vital Center matrix of neoconservative thought, and on the neocons’ double reaction against the cultural relativism of both the New Left and the Kissinger’s realist right. But he also highlights Kissinger’s own underestimation and mishandling of neoconservative opponents: for example, in 1973, Kissinger neglected to communicate to Congress that under the table he had obtained a deal from Moscow to ease Jewish emigration from the Soviet Union. Kissinger became a victim of his own “aphrodisiac,” power, which led him to believe he could stop Henry “Scoop” Jackson; but he was also a victim of his own

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<sup>7</sup> Memo Conversation Ford, Kissinger, Rumsfeld, Scowcroft, 24 May 1975 (qtd.- emphasis added), National Security Advisor Files, NSA, Memo Convs., box 11, Gerald Ford Presidential Library, Ann Arbor, MI; see also Memo Conversation Kissinger, Schmidt, Genscher, 27 July 1975, in *Ibidem*, box 13.

<sup>8</sup> Seymour Martin Lipset, *American Exceptionalism: A Double-Edged Sword* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1997).

assumption that neoconservatism could be handled because, after all, American exceptionalism and European-style realism could be made to fit together. Ultimately, Kissinger failed to explain to the American public the complexities and intricacies of an international system that was undergoing dramatic transformations, because he himself was prey to a “maniacally bipolar” perspective” (p. 148). And once the bipolar “genie” was out of the bottle, it became difficult to contain the resurgence of Manichean perspectives in the United States -- also with the complicity of a Soviet Union that, with its conduct, proved that the commonality of interests between the two superpowers was not as strong as Kissinger believed. Furthermore, Kissinger’s persistent bipolarism, as Del Pero argues along the lines of Jussi Hanhimäki’s “Flawed Architect” argument, “tended to amplify and aggravate” (p. 148) rather than solve regional and local tensions: for example, with the endorsement of a fascist regime in Chile, or neglecting realities in Vietnam and Cambodia that led to disaster in the late 1970s, or rekindling political tensions resulting from his rigidity toward the Italian government’s plan to open to a communist left that was rather reformed and detached from Moscow.

Del Pero’s account has the merit of interweaving the domestic and international aspects of Kissinger’s contradictions. Kissinger’s efforts to seek domestic legitimization of his foreign policies, we learn, were relentless, and not at all disrespectful of the American democratic process. But they were at the same time at odds with nationalist and exceptionalist sensitivities. Internationally, proposing an ambivalent relationship with the Soviet Union, while at first transforming the crisis of containment into an opportunity for a more mature foreign policy, in the end appeared as a sign of moral and strategic weakness, granting equality to a relentless foe. Kissinger’s moral and ideological repugnance toward communism was not as immediately apparent as his compromises, and his sense of mission and belief in the United States as a savior nation were also submerged by his obsession with bipolar stability. To neoconservatives, steeped (not without a dose of hypocrisy) in an absolutist and moralistic approach to world affairs, in the end Kissinger and the New Left had one thing in common: a tendency to capitulate to the enemy.

If it is true then that American foreign policy traditions -- moral, ideological, messianic -- had been “weakened but not destroyed” (p. 152) by the crisis of containment, now that neoconservative assumptions, and messianic views are again seriously questioned domestically and internationally, what is the lesson that Del Pero proposes in light of Kissinger’s merits and de-merits? The answer seems rather straightforward as much as challenging: a realism that, without denying the example of American democratic values, is truly attuned to the complexities of an international system that is undergoing even more dramatic transformations than in the 1970s; a realism that truly abandons intransigent positions, and that, in a way, combines multilateralism with genuine political pluralism. But Del Pero remains rather skeptical about the imminent demise of the neoconservative “moment,” and, more generally, about the passing of a highly ideological foreign policy discourse. Whether one agrees or not with Del Pero’s depiction of the United States’ congenital exceptionalism, hegemonic tendencies, and naiveté, any serious student of Kissinger’s diplomacy and of U.S. handling of world affairs in the twentieth century will have to deal with his compelling arguments about the challenges that truly realist assumptions have encountered in American foreign policy.

**M**ario Del Pero's deftly crafted and succinct book – or essay, as he labels it – is a nifty piece of writing and a thoughtful and provocative entry into the field of works on Henry Kissinger. Del Pero probes the historical background surrounding Kissinger's formative years before, during, and after World War Two; he then carefully examines the intellectual underpinnings of Kissinger's conceptualization of détente, its implementation, and its subsequent fall from grace. In one hundred fifty-two pages of text plus another twenty-nine pages of notes, Del Pero's accomplishment is all the more impressive because of the ease with which he surveys vast sweeps of serious intellectual history and because of his fluid writing; indeed, some of it is really quite lovely.

Almost as much fun as the text itself are Del Pero's notes, where the author displays his command of the secondary literature while weaving primary sources into his narrative. Del Pero, much to his credit, is unafraid to tackle previous scholars of Kissinger when he thinks they missed key aspects of his personality or exaggerated various components of his background. By way of example, Del Pero takes issue with those who have suggested, or argued, that Kissinger paid scant attention to public opinion and domestic political institutions. As he concludes, "Kissinger's attention to the domestic dimension – the media, public opinion, and Congress – was obsessive and almost maniacal. Such attention influenced his choices, action, and rhetoric during his years at the White House." (p. 150) Christopher Hitchens, no supporter of Kissinger's, concurred, observing, "his most successful diplomacy, indeed, has probably been conducted with the media."<sup>1</sup>

In another example, Del Pero quotes Jeremi Suri's careful investigation into the impact Kissinger's early upbringing in Nazi Germany had on the policies he pursued once in power. As Del Pero quotes Suri: "During his career, Kissinger would reserve special animosity for dictators who operated with the zealotry and violence he remembered from [anti-Semitic demagogue Julius] Streicher. Kissinger's views of fascist and communist extremism, embodied most clearly by the figures of Hitler and Stalin, were filtered through his early years in Fürth."<sup>2</sup> Del Pero is not sympathetic to this point. As he comments, "Suri's implications that Kissinger held violent and zealous dictators from the Right and Left in equal disregard is unsupported by the facts." Although Del Pero concentrates on Kissinger's writings, thoughts, and policies, he is directly on target here with respect to the facts, adding, "Kissinger got along well with many leaders of authoritarian regimes, such as Portugal's Marcelo Caetano, Spain's Francisco Franco, Chile's Augusto Pinochet, the members of military juntas in Greece and Argentina, and, one might add, Chou En-lai and Mao Zedong." And in a lovely flourish, Del Pero ends his comment shrewdly: "He seemed to have more problems with democratically elected leaders, particularly those in the U.S. sphere of influence, such as Salvador Allende, Mario Soares, and Aldo Moro." (p. 154) That's not only true, it's also a tart and telling observation given Del Pero's praise for Suri's effort.

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<sup>1</sup> Christopher Hitchens, "The Case Against Henry Kissinger," *Harper's Magazine* (February 2001), 36.

<sup>2</sup> Jeremi Suri, *Henry Kissinger and the American Century* (Belknap: Cambridge, 2007), 34.

One recurring theme in Del Pero's assessment is Kissinger's desperate focus on credibility. He notes that, "nourished by an obsession for credibility that made it impossible to distinguish theaters central to U.S. interests from those that were less important" (p. 59), Del Pero hits on a central component to Kissinger's thinking. He used an approach that failed to appreciate local conditions, whether they happened to be part of European or South American political developments.<sup>3</sup>

Beneath this discussion of Kissinger's "obsession" with credibility lay a mean streak and a disregard for smaller, especially third-world nations, their leaders and political processes, particularly when people acted in ways Kissinger found unacceptable to American wishes. But Del Pero only hints at these aspects to Kissinger's personality, or in this case, to his eccentricity. And yet, Kissinger himself provided ample evidence in his own writings. In describing his February 1973 visit to Hanoi, Kissinger had this to say about Le Duc Tho, the principal North Vietnamese negotiator: "Nor did he abandon his courtesy – except once, in May 1972, when, carried away by the prospect of seemingly imminent victory, he was tempted into insolence."<sup>4</sup> Later, Kissinger took another jab at his Vietnamese counterpart while comparing China and Vietnam, with the former getting the plaudits and the latter receiving the barbs, and in this instance he decided to compare North Vietnam's Pham Van Dong and China's Zhou Enlai. "Pham Van Dong was of the stuff of which revolutionary heroes are made. Zhou, while a revolutionary himself, was of the stuff of which great leaders are made."<sup>5</sup> The back-handed compliment to Pham Van Dong (not measuring up to Zhou), and the insolence of Le Duc Tho (how rude of him to seek independence from foreign control), reveal that Kissinger, as Del Pero observes, was captivated by his own bipolarism to the extent that nations not fitting neatly into its confines created structural dissonance, which, from Kissinger's perspective, meant labeling the North Vietnamese as insolent. "Hanoi's leaders," Kissinger repeated, "soon showed that they had lost none of the insolence that for years had set our teeth on edge."<sup>6</sup>

Nations like North Vietnam could not have legitimate aspirations or interests of their own; everything had to be filtered through the Cold War context, and so in assessing the negotiations between the United States and North Vietnam, Kissinger wrote, "I was developing the queasy feeling that we were being tested, that if we did not force a showdown soon on the issue of resupply and infiltration the war would resume whenever Hanoi was ready, and all we would have done was purchase a brief respite for the

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<sup>3</sup> Or on page 55, and borrowing from Frank Ninkovich's discussion of the "obsession for credibility", Del Pero asserts, "As a consequence of this obsession, 'few places in the world' could be 'automatically ruled out as unimportant,' while a 'continual use of force, and not simply the constant assertion of a ready willingness to use it' was required."

<sup>4</sup> Henry Kissinger, *Years of Upheaval* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1982), 24.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.

withdrawal of our forces.”<sup>7</sup> Again, Del Pero’s point about the importance of credibility surfaces here as Kissinger could only see the situation unfolding from its impact upon him and how he was being tested.

Hanoi’s leaders were insolent because they were not equals. They were, instead, boldly impudent. Seymour Hersh referred to this kind of thinking and language as it pertained to Latin America: “Like a child, Latin America was to be seen and not heard. Those who defied Nixon, such as [Gabriel] Valdés and Eduardo Frei – and, later, Salvador Allende – were to be treated harshly.”<sup>8</sup>

Del Pero brings these aspects of Kissinger’s personality into his conclusion where he notes, “Kissinger’s awareness of the strength and solidity of bipolarism induced him to adopt a rigidly bipolar strategy.” (p. 148) And when that structure proved untenable with regard to certain countries, Kissinger became frustrated, “adopting a ‘maniacally bipolar’ perspective that reduced the capacity to understand the nuances and intricacies of a complex international system in which power was undergoing dramatic transformations.”

Despite all the sophistication and insight Del Pero brings to his essay, there remains something slightly unsatisfying in his overall treatment of Kissinger and his ideas. To label Kissinger “eccentric” seems to underplay his deviousness, his nastiness, and his ability and desire to justify brutality. Eccentric suggests a certain harmless quirkiness, often used to describe an older relative, an aunt or grandfather, perhaps, someone who likes to go for walks in the snow wearing nothing but running shorts, a t-shirt, and a pair of loafers. Kissinger was not eccentric. He was deceitful and manipulative, which, admittedly, is not to say anything that cannot also be said of many politicians and high-level bureaucrats. But Del Pero’s account only hints to that side of Kissinger. It’s there, but it resides beneath the surface. “The attempt to systematically impose a bipolar ‘cage’ on the international system, however, particularly through linkage, accentuated a series of problems instead of solving them. It simplified complex realities and problems, impeding their comprehension and solution. Kissinger’s bipolarism thus tended to amplify and aggravate regional and local tensions, which were automatically placed within the binary scheme of the now de-ideologized competition with Moscow.” (p. 148)

The cover photograph is telling. Kissinger is shown in the foreground (an audience slightly blurred in the background) smiling at the camera, hands clasped and resting on a table or a railing. The genial Kissinger with the horned-rimmed glasses, the avuncular, German-accented Jew with a healthy sense of self-deprecating humor, the man who, at one point, was all the media rage. “Super K”. Kissinger the eccentric indeed.

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<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 33.

<sup>8</sup> Seymour M. Hersh, *The Price of Power: Kissinger in the Nixon White House* (New York: Summit Books, 1983), 263.

Christopher Hitchens has leveled the most serious broadside against Kissinger, a set of accusations that raise fundamental questions as to whether the former globe-trotting “Super K” can actually visit certain countries for fear of either extradition or legal charges, especially in light of what befell Chilean General Augusto Pinochet in 1998. “One must credit Kissinger with grasping what so many other people did not,” Hitchens noted: “that if the Pinochet precedent became established, then he himself was in some danger.”<sup>9</sup>

Seymour Hersh described one of many examples of Kissinger’s bureaucratic maneuvering to get his way, this time circumventing even the president. Kissinger was alarmed at some routine and non-threatening developments at the Cuban base of Cienfuegos in 1970. The Soviets had expanded the facilities to allow their naval crews the opportunity for some rest and recreation there. The military analysis pointed to something non-threatening, but Kissinger would have none of that. When Nixon refused to act, Kissinger took matters into his own hands. “Faced with a President who would not take the tough road, Kissinger treated him like any other bureaucratic enemy, and leaked to the press.” Hersh adds that although Kissinger may have had no ulterior motive in managing things this way – in other words, he simply believed (erroneously, as it turned out) that the Soviet construction at Cienfuegos was more substantial than it really was – he was not about to let things lie. So he leaked the story, despite the fact that there was no strategic advantage to the Soviets even if his interpretation of things had been true. As Hersh concluded, “It was all in a day’s work for Kissinger. Having leaked the story, he now managed to get one of his archenemies, the Pentagon, blamed for the leak.”<sup>10</sup>

In short, Kissinger was a consummate bureaucrat, and he was determined to win, or to have his way, at any cost, whether it meant enticing multiple presidential candidates to pursue his services, outmaneuvering the president on a particular issue, undermining the democratically elected leader of a nation because his nation’s people had the temerity to elect someone not considered amenable to American interests, or savagely bombing and thus sharply escalating a war already lost – all for the sake of credibility.

The problem with Kissinger was that despite his being a master thinker and practitioner of statecraft and diplomacy, despite his professed and deeply held understanding of realism and realpolitik, he was just as petty and emotional as many politicians, and far more dangerous – especially since his proclivities were reinforced by his boss. The result was a realism that was far more brutal, savage, and destructive than it was eccentric, and that remains the sad legacy of Henry Kissinger.

Far from being simply eccentric, therefore, in the sense of being odd or whimsical, Kissinger was struck with an obsession with credibility – his own as it was tied to that of the Nixon administration and United States foreign policy – to the extent that it approached

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<sup>9</sup> Hitchens, “The Case Against Henry Kissinger,” 36. See also, Christopher Hitchens, *The Trial of Henry Kissinger* (London: Verso, 2001).

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 254.

the quality of being a malady. Mario Del Pero has produced an extraordinary work of subtlety and nuance, but he has missed a critical aspect to Henry Kissinger, which is all the more disappointing because he clearly knows better.

In the annals of the historiography of U.S. diplomacy, Kissingerology—a term used in the work under review—deserves a sub-field of its own. Can such acres of paper, such vats of ink, ever have been devoted to dissecting, praising, assailing, and assessing any other single American secretary of state? Further enhancing the phenomenon, their subject—admittedly no longer in his first youth—is still alive, and indeed active and productive, his personal papers generally closed to research. Few historians would question the significance to twentieth century U.S. foreign policy of such key secretaries of state as Dean Acheson and John Foster Dulles, yet four or five decades after the death of each the shelf of works devoted to either man is by comparison modest. Among American political figures, only the major presidents—Woodrow Wilson, the two Roosevelts, perhaps Dwight D. Eisenhower, John F. Kennedy, Lyndon B. Johnson, and Richard Nixon, under whom Kissinger served—have rivaled and indeed often surpassed Kissinger in terms of the sheer amount of scholarly and popular writing they have generated.

The torrent shows little sign of abating to a trickle in the foreseeable future. Post-office, Kissinger remains as controversial as ever, perhaps more so. Beginning with the best-selling work *The Kissinger Transcripts*, in which William F. Burr of the National Security Archive in Washington, DC, made available the texts of Kissinger's conversations with top Soviet and Chinese leaders, the ever increasing quantities of Nixon administration files open to the public has brought a new flood of volumes.<sup>1</sup> The past decade has seen major new assessments of Kissinger by Jussi Hanhimäki and Jeremi Suri; a study of Nixon's and Kissinger's decision-making process on foreign policy, by the British academic Asaf Siniver; a largely favorable study comparing the foreign policies of Dean Rusk and Kissinger; and popular books in which Kissinger is a major protagonist by Robert Dallek, Alistair Horne, and Margaret MacMillan.<sup>2</sup> Interestingly and significantly, many of the more recent works on Kissinger have been produced either by non-Americans or by younger scholars, not old enough to remember or be influenced by the bitter debates over American involvement in Vietnam and Indochina and other controversial aspects of Kissinger's tenure of office, notably covert efforts to destabilize the government of Salvador Gossens Allende in Chile and American ties to a wide variety of authoritarian regimes.

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<sup>1</sup> William Burr, ed., *The Kissinger Transcripts: The Top Secret Talks with Beijing and Moscow* (New York: The New Press, 1998).

<sup>2</sup> Jussi Hanhimäki, *The Flawed Architect: Henry Kissinger and American Foreign Policy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004); Jeremi Suri, *Henry Kissinger and the American Century* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007); Asaf Siniver, *Nixon, Kissinger, and U.S. Foreign Policy Making: The Machinery of Crisis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008); Laurence W. Serewicz, *America at the Brink of Empire: Rusk, Kissinger, and the Vietnam War* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2007); Margaret MacMillan, *Nixon and Mao: The Week that Changed the World* (New York: Random House, 2007); Robert Dallek, *Nixon and Kissinger: Partners in Power* (New York: HarperCollins, 2007); Alistair Horne, *Kissinger: 1973, the Crucial Year* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2009).

For many Americans of the Vietnam generation, Kissinger remains anathema, his misdeeds compounded by the fact that to all appearances an unrepentant Kissinger believes his policies were excusable and entirely justified by the requirements of the United States as a great power. Many other prominent American policymakers who were at least partially responsible for American intervention in the conflict spent the rest of their lives anguishing over their part in what was until recently America's Longest War. The brothers William and McGeorge Bundy lost the brilliant career prospects that they had once anticipated, and each spent the final decades of his life working and re-working a personal manuscript on Vietnam, unable to finish and publish their accounts. Dean Rusk and Walt Rostow were exiled from the East Coast academic mainstream circuit of policy institutes, neither able to make the transformation into respected consultant and pundit that so many retired American officials experience. Robert McNamara spent decades at the World Bank, supposedly atoning for the deaths he had caused in Vietnam, before finally publishing his own memoirs, a work fiercely attacked by many Americans on the grounds that former secretary of defense had failed to demonstrate adequate remorse and repentance for his actions. Richard Nixon, whom Kissinger served until August 1974, was in some ways the most tragic figure of all. A man of great ability, he accomplished much during his presidency, implementing major new departures in foreign affairs while engineering a major domestic political realignment in the United States, one that lasted for several decades. After winning re-election by a landslide in 1972, Nixon was brought down by his own weaknesses, primarily his readiness to sanction extra-legal acts aimed at his rivals and "enemies" that far surpassed the acceptable limits of American political behavior, and became the only president to resign his office in disgrace.

Tragedy passed the more politic Kissinger by. Despite a propensity for Germanic rhetoric on the dark, fearsome, and sometimes tragic choices facing international statesmen, he was almost preternaturally resilient, displaying the skill of a circus acrobat in landing on his feet. In the final months of Nixon's presidency Dr. Kissinger was widely viewed as the one redeeming bright spot in an administration most of whose other personnel soon faced criminal investigation for their involvement in the complex of unauthorized activities revealed during the Watergate scandal. By the end of Gerald Ford's presidency, liberals were disillusioned with Kissinger's readiness to sanction Cold War interventions against left-wing governments and to support totalitarian but non-communist regimes on a global scale, effectively continuing the policies of earlier Cold War policymakers. The burgeoning neoconservative movement, by contrast, deplored his readiness to reach accommodation with the Soviet Union. Kissinger, however, proved remarkably adept at outfacing his critics. Some snubs there were: in the late 1970s, Kissinger was the sole individual among nine nominated candidates who failed to win election to one of eight positions as directors of the prestigious Council on Foreign Relations, which had been prominent among the early springboards for his career. A large number of CFR members undoubtedly voted against Kissinger, the best known of those running for these spots. While Kissinger liked to highlight his academic background and Harvard Ph.D., William Bundy, the Boston Brahmin editor of the CFR's well regarded journal *Foreign Affairs*, deliberately refused to address him as "Dr. Kissinger."

Kissinger was notoriously vain, but these were mere pinpricks. From the mid-1970s onward, he was sufficiently *persona non grata* with much of the New Right, that formal governmental advisory and consultative positions were few and far between, though successive presidential administrations sought his advice on occasion, and willingly or not were offered his counsel, by letter or in the press, on numerous issues. But around the world, Kissinger was much feted. In China, officials and students alike generally revered him, and he was a fixture in elite gatherings of business and political leaders, prominent among the American and international great and good. Kissinger Associates, the consulting business he established on leaving office, proved an extremely lucrative undertaking. Happily remarried, Kissinger acquired a Connecticut estate and a New York apartment, carefully screened his encounters with outsiders, and socialized with such luminaries as David Rockefeller, Brooke Astor, Katharine Graham of the *Washington Post*, and Diana, Princess of Wales. Like Ole Man River, despite all criticism—and criticism aplenty there has been—he just keeps rolling along.

Snugly cocooned in his rarefied, well protected, and very comfortable existence, Kissinger frequently commented on international affairs, producing lengthy op-ed pieces on most significant issues that were featured prominently in the press, and formed part of the public debate on these subjects. He also wrote three lengthy volumes of memoirs, more than 4,000 pages in all, books that undoubtedly represented his attempt to set the historical record in his favor. They were supplemented by a lengthy study on the subject of Diplomacy, in which Kissinger set out his views on the subject that had, in one way and another, been the guiding preoccupation of his career; an inquiry into whether the United States really needed a foreign policy, and if so what kind; and in the early 2000s by another two volumes on his part in the ending of the Vietnam War and handling the Middle East crisis that began with the October 1973 Yom Kippur War, deploying some of the newly released documentary material on which new scholarship on these topics was increasingly founded. The 4,000-plus pages of Kissinger's memoirs—slightly less in terms of pages than those of Winston Churchill, though given the relative print sizes Kissinger's word count is probably longer—may have been designed to pre-empt the verdict of history, but they have proved an enticing and substantial target.<sup>3</sup> Among historians, it has become almost a cottage industry to take a chapter or two of Kissinger's memoirs, to be tested for accuracy against the sources on the subject, American and foreign, that are increasingly open to research. Doctoral theses, academic articles, and passionate polemics have been devoted to pointing out just where and how Kissinger omitted or misrepresented facts or was, in the kindest interpretation, economical with the truth. This was perhaps a venial fault. No historian with any claim to intelligence approaches the memoirs of any politician or statesman, or indeed any other figure, be they the reminiscences of Casanova or of Saint

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<sup>3</sup> Henry Kissinger, *White House Years* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1979); Kissinger, *Years of Upheaval* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1982); Kissinger, *Years of Renewal* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1999); Kissinger, *Diplomacy* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1994); Kissinger, *Does America Need a Foreign Policy? Toward a Diplomacy for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2001); Kissinger, *Crisis: The Anatomy of Two Major Foreign Policy Crises* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1999); and Kissinger, *Ending the Vietnam War: A History of America's Involvement in and Extrication from the Vietnam War* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2003).

Jimmy Carter, expecting to find the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. Two recent studies of Winston Churchill's memoirs of World War II have demonstrated how the wartime prime minister had very definite purposes in writing these volumes, pre-eminent among them his desire to cement a continuing Anglo-American alliance against the Soviet Union by downplaying the existence of wartime tensions between the two Western allies.<sup>4</sup> Kissinger's objective may have been the less exalted one of safeguarding his place and image in history, but as preoccupations go this is one he shares with numerous authors of autobiographical writings.

It may, however, have been Kissinger's very ability to survive and flourish that so galled many of his critics, especially those who lived through the Vietnam years and were politically active then. Some of the biographies of Kissinger that appeared during and not long after his time in office, notably those by the journalists Bernard and Marvin Kalb, and that of Walter Isaacson, were relatively evenhanded.<sup>5</sup> Others, however, were fiercely critical, in particular that by Seymour Hersh, later to be an equally ferocious assailant of President George W. Bush's war against Iraq.<sup>6</sup> The passions still stirred by Vietnam are also apparent in the heavily researched works on the policies of Kissinger and Nixon towards the Indochina conflict that have recently appeared, most of them highly critical of the actions of both president and secretary of state. These generally suggest that the impact of the two men on the conflict was both destructive and inhumane, extending it pointlessly, and that both were responsible for misleading the American people regarding their efforts to end the fighting.<sup>7</sup> The most spectacular indictment of Kissinger, however, was a short book by the Washington-based British journalist Christopher Hitchens, published in 2001, alleging that Kissinger's actions while in office, especially his secret sanctioning of heavy American bombing of Cambodia and Laos as well as North Vietnam, amounted to war crimes and genocide, for which he should face trial.<sup>8</sup> Kissinger responded by refusing to appear in any venue in which these charges were discussed. The book sold well, but did little to dent Kissinger's standing. Those who disliked, even detested him

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<sup>4</sup> David Reynolds, *Churchill in Command of History: Fighting and Writing the Second World War* (New York: Random House, 2005); John Ramsden, *Man of the Century: Winston Churchill and His Legend Since 1945* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003).

<sup>5</sup> Marvin Kalb and Bernard Kalb, *Kissinger* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1974); Walter Isaacson, *Kissinger: A Biography* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1992).

<sup>6</sup> Seymour Hersh, *Kissinger: The Price of Power* (New York: Summit Books, 1983); also Robert D. Schulzinger, *Henry Kissinger: Doctor of Diplomacy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989).

<sup>7</sup> An early example of this viewpoint was William Shawcross, *Sideshow: Kissinger, Nixon and the Destruction of Cambodia* (London: André Deutsch, 1979). More recent works include Larry Berman, *No Peace, No Honor: Nixon, Kissinger, and Betrayal in Vietnam* (New York: The Free Press, 2001); Jeffrey Kimball, *Nixon's Vietnam War* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1998); Kimball, *The Vietnam War Files: Uncovering the Secret History of Nixon-Era Strategy* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2003); John Prados, *Vietnam: The History of an Unwinnable War* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2009).

<sup>8</sup> Christopher Hitchens, *The Trial of Henry Kissinger* (New York: Verso, 2001).

continued to do so; his friends remained his friends; and many foreigners who respected him watched with bemusement the newest vagaries of the discourse of American politics.

The latest offering on Kissinger, by the Italian Mario Del Pero, a work that joins those that take a relatively dispassionate view of its subject, seeks to explore the nature of Kissinger's "realism," and how well suited it was to the American political system and culture. As Del Pero himself admits, this book is basically an "extended essay" focusing on one particular aspect of Kissinger's intellectual outlook. Throughout his career, perhaps especially in the early years when he was a hungry, brash, up-and-coming young academic eager to wrap his fingers around the levers of political power and influence, Kissinger skillfully presented himself as an exponent of the European foreign policy tradition of realism, one who eschewed ideological fervor and moral crusades, preferring instead the rational pursuit of the national interest and national security.<sup>9</sup> In Del Pero's words: "When it comes to foreign policy, being a realist means being cognizant of power realities, the unalterable structural features of the international system, the rules and practices of such a system (devoid of any meliorist utopia or missionary impulse), and placing the national interest above any other concern." (p. 4) This perspective laid much emphasis upon the maintenance of an international balance of power favorable to the United States. Kissinger's stated models were such "heroic statesmen" as Prince Klement von Metternich of Austria, British Foreign Secretary George Castlereagh, and Chancellor Otto von Bismarck of Germany. In the twentieth century, he greatly admired Winston Churchill, Britain's great war leader, and the towering post-1945 European political figures, Chancellor Konrad Adenauer of West Germany and General Charles de Gaulle of France.

Del Pero takes a skeptical view of Kissinger's professed realism, especially his claim that he brought a fresh perspective to American foreign policy. One thing that has never been in doubt has been Kissinger's penchant for self-promotion, a constant trait throughout his career. In 1992, after complaining incessantly to one journalist of the treatment of himself in the volume by one of his biographers, the relatively sympathetic Walter Isaacson, Kissinger finished by telling his interlocutor that "however much I hate this book, it is better than no book."<sup>10</sup> He preferred to be discussed, even from a hostile perspective, than to be ignored. Throughout his career this was something of a *leitmotif*. Self-marketing, and the sedulous cultivation of those who might be useful to him, were also among Kissinger's great skills. Kissinger liked to claim that, in terms of American political culture, his approach to U.S. foreign policy was innovative, applying European norms and an absence of shortsighted and counter-productive moralism and legalism to the Soviet-American Cold War global international rivalry that had developed since 1945. Del Pero queries just how innovative Kissinger's prescriptions were, highlighting his subject's "inclination to feign eccentricity and idiosyncrasy, where conformism was dominant." (p. 6) By the late 1960s, Del Pero argues, the main trajectories of future American foreign policy, whoever won the presidential election of 1968, were already clear: arms control negotiations tending toward

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<sup>9</sup> Serewicz, *America at the Brink of Empire*, is the latest study to view Kissinger from this perspective.

<sup>10</sup> Quoted in Dallek, *Nixon and Kissinger*, 615.

détente with the Soviet Union; the need to bring American involvement in the Vietnam conflict to an end; the pressure to restore some kind of relationship with the Communist government of mainland China; and overall, the need to adjust American foreign policy to a situation in which there were limits both on what the United States could accomplish internationally and on the resources the country could afford to deploy, in terms not just of funding but of the casualties the American military could absorb. In his writings of the 1950s and 1960s, Del Pero contends, Kissinger displayed a talent amounting to a genius for putting forward prescriptions that were packaged and phrased to appear far more radical and original than they genuinely were, demonstrating a “good dose of opportunism and unscrupulousness” in advocating policies that were “never truly heretical or outside the zeitgeist.” (p. 44)

By this account, Kissinger was particularly adept at taking the conventional wisdom of the time, and enveloping it in turgid and sometimes nearly incomprehensible prose that camouflaged his ability to position himself very ably in the forefront of mainstream thinking on foreign affairs. Acutely, Del Pero notes that in some respects, Kissinger was out of step with orthodox thinking in policymaking circles of the 1950s and 1960s: he paid little heed to economics, or to the potential ability of modernization theory to win over the developing Third World to the American camp in the Cold War. His preoccupations were geopolitical and strategic, and economics never ranked high in his worldview. He focused almost exclusively, moreover, upon Europe and on Soviet-American relations, with little knowledge of or interest in the developing world. Following Kissinger’s own lead, scholars have, Del Pero argues, minimized “the historically determined and, paradoxically, quintessentially American nature of Kissinger’s realism: a realism that found its ideal environment and cultural medium in the Cold War.” (p. 50)

In practice, moreover, according to Del Pero, once in office Kissinger was far more respectful of existing Cold War norms than he would subsequently admit. One of the great flaws in Kissinger’s realism, in Del Pero’s analysis, was that despite his stated faith in multipolarity, as National Security Adviser and Secretary of State he fundamentally accepted the existing bipolar perspective on the international system that had developed during the Cold War. Nowhere was this more true than in the sphere of détente with the Soviet Union. In Del Pero’s view, détente was “an attempt to co-manage bipolarism in order to consolidate and uphold it. As such it was geopolitically conservative because it sought to preserve the status quo and keep in check the many forces that were ending the bipolar discipline.” (p. 9) Kissinger continued to perceive the international order and events through a bipolar prism, causing him to deplore and seek to undercut the emergence of socialist regimes and, still worse, Eurocommunism in Italy, Spain, Portugal, and France. He also demonstrated little sympathy for efforts by West European leaders, especially Chancellor Willy Brandt of West Germany, and to a lesser degree Charles de Gaulle, to implement their own versions of détente, and was a particularly harsh critic of Brandt’s Ostpolitik. Having written earlier of the need for greater consultation between the United States and its European allies, once in power Kissinger generally ignored his previous advice. Elsewhere, he unhesitatingly continued the American policy of supporting authoritarian but non-communist regimes around the world, regardless of their domestic shortcomings, and of acquiescing in and encouraging efforts to overturn unduly

radical governments, notably that of President Allende in Chile. Del Pero suggests, therefore, that Kissinger “paid little more than lip service to the notion of multipolarism.” (p. 9) Maintaining American “credibility” was, in addition, one of Kissinger’s greatest preoccupations, in Del Pero’s view an “unrealistic” objective that often compromised his ability to implement the policies he supposedly supported. In Indochina, for example, it meant four additional years of costly warfare, thousands more American casualties, tens of thousands of additional Vietnamese deaths, and the extension of bombing and warfare to Laos and Cambodia, all at a cost of many extra billions of dollars.

Del Pero’s view of Kissinger’s purported realism is in many respects refreshingly iconoclastic; with some irony, he states that “Kissinger’s realism lacked, ultimately, the necessary dose of realism.” (p. 9) This does, however, beg the question of just what constituted American realism in international affairs, something that has never perhaps been quite adequately defined. Intellectually, the American Realist tradition emerged during and just after the Second World War, the product of a cross-fertilization of ideas between American Atlanticists who were apostles of the navalist teachings of Alfred Thayer Mahan, that American security ultimately depended upon the protection afforded by the British fleet and the maintenance of a favorable balance of power on the European continent; academic adherents of the new discipline of geopolitics; émigré scholars from Europe; and the teachings of the theologian Reinhold Niebuhr. During the war the different ingredients that melded into this brew were brought together at the major East Coast universities, especially the Yale Institute of International Studies, which turned out books and working papers promoting closer Anglo-American relations. Among its most prominent exponents were the scholar Hans J. Morgenthau, like Kissinger a Jewish refugee from Hitler’s Germany; George F. Kennan, the diplomat who articulated the strategy of containment that became the guiding principle of American Cold War policy; and the legendary political pundit and journalist, Walter Lippmann. Despite differences among them, all tended to emphasize the importance of protecting American national interests, while avoiding globalist excesses, overblown universalist rhetoric, and unnecessary commitments and alliances, and of tailoring American security policies to the resources the United States could afford to deploy in their protection. All also emphasized the importance of working closely with United States allies.<sup>11</sup> In practice, however, their

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<sup>11</sup> On the Realists, see Michael Joseph Smith, *Realist Thought from Weber to Kissinger* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1991); Michael C. Williams, ed., *Realism Reconsidered: The Legacy of Hans Morgenthau in International Relations* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007); Michael C. Williams, *The Realist Tradition and the Limits of International Relations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); Seán Molloy, *The Hidden History of Realism: A Genealogy of Power Politics* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006); Richard Ned Lebow, *The Tragic Vision of Politics: Ethics, Interests and Orders* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Jack Donnelly, *Realism and International Relations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Daniel Bell, ed., *Political thought and International Relations: Variations on a Realist Theme* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009); Joel H. Rosenthal, *Righteous Realists: Political Realism, Responsible Power, and American Culture in the Nuclear Age* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1991); Christoph Frei, *Hans J. Morgenthau: An Intellectual Biography* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2001); Campbell Craig, *Glimmer of a New Leviathan: Total War in the Realism of Niebuhr, Morgenthau, and Waltz* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003); Greg Russell, *Hans J. Morgenthau and the Ethics of American Statecraft* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1990); William E. Scheuerman, *Hans Morgenthau: Realism and Beyond* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2009); Colm McKeogh, *The Political Realism of*

definitions of just what were vital and what were non-essential American interests were never entirely clear, and those put forward by different individuals did not always correspond with each other. Paradoxically, moreover, while most self-styled Realists considered overmuch moralism a deplorable weakness in the conduct of American foreign affairs, they also believed that the United States must demonstrate adequate concern for moral and humanitarian concerns, as well as security interests. In one example cited by Del Pero, in 1975 and 1976 Morgenthau and Kennan disagreed over Kissinger's reluctance to make support of leading Russian dissidents, including Andrei Sakharov and Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn as well as would-be Jewish émigrés from the Soviet Union, a high priority in Soviet-American relations, with Kennan supporting and Morgenthau opposing Kissinger's stance. In every respect, finding the appropriate balance was the great challenge facing American realists, one on which realists themselves often failed to reach agreement. The elegant riddles of the English metaphysical poets, in which every term and concept can metamorphose seamlessly into its opposite, offered perhaps the closest parallel to the intricacies of American Realist thinking.

The second major argument of Del Pero's essay is that, despite claims by Kissinger that he paid little if any attention to politics, believing that foreign affairs should be conducted by experts such as himself, sedulously insulated from the demands and pressures of partisan politics, in fact both he and Nixon were acutely conscious not just of the political ramifications and impact of the foreign policy measures they introduced, but also of the need to win support for them from Congress and beyond. As more documents from the Nixon presidency have become available, it is clear that president and national security adviser alike often sought to deploy their handling of foreign policy and exploit particular developments for the electoral advantage of the president and his party, and that politics were rarely far from their minds. Kissinger, whose entire career depended on his ability to win the favor and patronage of powerful politicians, has always been a political animal, deftly adjusting his writings to what powerful officials wanted to hear, or, as he might prefer to put it, phrasing and shading the message in a way that will make it acceptable. Never running for political office himself, to enjoy power and influence he needed to work through those individuals who did command the political levers. When in office, he rarely felt free to ignore the political interests of his patrons. His telephone logs and diaries also reveal that he spent an inordinate amount of his own time cultivating not just Congress but also the press, in the process converting himself into an unlikely celebrity, developing what in communist states would have been termed a personality cult around himself. While one purpose of such contacts was undoubtedly to feed his own notoriously egoistic vanity,

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*Reinhold Niebuhr: A Pragmatic Approach to Just War* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997); Richard Wightman Fox, *Reinhold Niebuhr: A Biography* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1985); Martin Halliwell, *The Constant Dialogue: Reinhold Niebuhr and American Culture* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2005); Bruce Kuklick, *Blind Oracles: Intellectuals and War from Kennan to Kissinger* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007); Vibeke Schou Tjalve, *Realist Strategies of Republican Peace: Niebuhr, Morgenthau, and the Politics of Patriotic Dissent* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).

excellent media relations were also extremely helpful to him in drumming up public support for his foreign policy initiatives.

The mutual fascination that Kissinger and the press exerted on each other are by now well documented, as is the fact that, whatever his rhetoric, Kissinger was enormously concerned with winning good publicity and favorable political backing for himself personally and his policies. More original is Del Pero's third and final argument, that Kissinger's realistic approach to foreign affairs was inherently unsuited to American political culture, and therefore quickly proved unviable; that "Kissinger's realist moment revealed itself as a parenthetical period in the history of the United States." (p. 11) Is this genuinely true? Del Pero suggests that cultural and historical factors have predisposed Americans to favor unilateralist, globalist, moralistic, and messianic foreign policies, and that Kissinger's amoral, cynical, European-style handling of international affairs was therefore profoundly antipathetic to American traditions. Leaving aside the fact that, earlier in his book Del Pero suggested that Kissinger's brand of realism was in practice carefully tailored to the American Cold War mindset, one wonders how well this condemnation of Kissinger's realism stands up. When he was in office, his approach won widespread praise from across most of the political spectrum. If less original than Kissinger (and Nixon, who was at least equally responsible for the realignment and readjustment of the U.S. international position) suggested, the implementation of what was sometimes termed "Nixingerism" represented a genuine triumph for both men. Even as the burgeoning Watergate scandal overwhelmed Nixon, Kissinger was perceived as the last bastion of sanity and accomplishment in an ever more tarnished administration.

What, then, went wrong? Why were many of Kissinger's policies ultimately rejected? Or were they? Even though Watergate initially raised his stature, Kissinger's rather rapid decline in influence and credibility undoubtedly owed a good deal to Nixon's fall and associated developments. Public and congressional dissatisfaction with the ever lengthening Vietnam war, together with revelations of presidential abuses, precipitated numerous investigations into malpractices in the conduct of both domestic and foreign policies, leaving Kissinger himself implicated in some of their revelations. Mud began to stick even to Mr. Clean, as it became known that he had ordered clandestine wiretaps of his staff, authorized secret bombings and invasions of Cambodia and Laos, and approved and encouraged the destabilization of foreign governments that the United States considered too radical. His readiness to encourage what were increasingly viewed as the excesses of the CIA also compromised Kissinger's once pristine reputation. To many American liberals, it also betokened a disturbing tendency toward unilateral interventionism on the part of the United States. Realism's value-free amorality was supposed to mandate tolerance of regimes that the United States might find uncongenial, not efforts to promote their overthrow. On the other side of the political spectrum, neoconservatives and the New Right accused Kissinger of being too soft on the Soviet Union and too ready to compromise with the foremost international opponent of the United States, and demanded increases in military spending.<sup>12</sup> Even though he remained Secretary of State until January 1977, under

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<sup>12</sup> For an example of this viewpoint, see Frank A. Capell, *Henry Kissinger, Soviet Agent* (Zarephath, NJ: The Herald of Freedom, 1974).

Gerald Ford, an unelected president with little expertise in foreign affairs, Kissinger's star was already in decline. Of the two presidents who succeeded Ford, Jimmy Carter would place new emphasis on international human rights, a theme of little interest to Kissinger, while Ronald Reagan would highlight conflict rather than compromise with the Soviet Union.

Yet it is worth noting that in practice, rhetoric to the contrary notwithstanding, on all sides the rejection of Kissinger's precepts was far from total. This was not just because many of his protégés remained influential as government officials long after Kissinger's departure, and frequently consulted their mentor and patron. Nor was it simply because, as Del Pero points out at the beginning of his study, all bureaucrats dealing with foreign affairs are to some degree forced to deal with existing reality and at that level therefore must be realists. (In this respect, one is reminded how the Duke of Wellington, when a rather gushing woman proclaimed to him, "I accept the universe," responded, "By God, madam, you'd better!") When one carefully scrutinizes Kissinger's policies, was he quite so conciliatory to the Soviet Union as his critics on the right liked to suggest? The record of the 1973 Middle Eastern war, when he ordered a nuclear alert, suggests otherwise. Kissinger had a pronounced fondness for unilateral action, frequently ignoring the concerns of America's West European allies and often neglecting to inform them of significant developments, characteristics that were also much in evidence in subsequent administrations. And Del Pero has already highlighted Kissinger's own covert anti-Communist interventionism, his tendency to view developments in the direction of radicalism elsewhere in the world through the bipolar prism of the Cold War, a practice that Reagan took up again with renewed enthusiasm, if limited success. Even when right-wing opponents assailed the SALT I Treaty that was the centerpiece of Kissinger's Soviet-American détente and blocked SALT II, the United States—as well as the Soviets—continued to observe the limits on nuclear weaponry set by those accords. Ultimately, after treating his first term as almost an anti-Soviet crusade, at least in rhetorical terms, Reagan proved than more willing to give credence to Mikhail Gorbachev's moves in the direction of a new Soviet-American understanding.

Paradoxically, viewed from some angles Kissinger's successors were rather more timid than he had been. Although both employed surrogates against regimes in Afghanistan and later Central America that they found unacceptable and sought to overthrow, neither Carter nor Reagan committed U.S. forces to overseas military operations on anything approaching the scale that Kissinger and Nixon authorized in Indochina, widening a war that they were supposed to be drawing to an end. And, whatever campaign rhetoric they might use when running for the presidency, both continued the Nixon-era policies of rapprochement with China, as—whatever the strains in that relationship—every president up to the present time has done. Examined in detail, with some of the rhetorical excesses stripped away, the continuities between Kissinger's policies and those of successive administrations seem quite striking. Jacqueline Kennedy, when her first husband came under attack on account of his Catholicism, apparently once complained that this was so unfair to poor Jack, since he was "such a bad Catholic." One might likewise argue that the fact that the presidents who followed Kissinger emulated many of his practices quite possibly reflected how, when one studies his record closely, he was such a bad realist.

Whether or not one agrees with all the arguments Del Pero advances, the appearance of this study is another refreshing move away from the tendencies toward either excessive adulation or demonization of its subject that have been all too pronounced a feature of Kissingerology. Whether the field will continue to expand at the same exponential level as in the past, with ever more works on Kissinger produced by a massive corps of academics, journalists, and popular biographers, is an interesting question. Ultimately, Kissinger relied on political patrons to give him the opportunities to implement his policies; his influence depended on the degree to which he could convince those in power to follow his advice. Before holding office and once again after his years in government ended, Kissinger circumspectly tended to adjust aspects of his own thinking and advice to accord with the perspectives of those politicians he sought to influence. It is interesting to compare him with the maverick realist and diplomat George F. Kennan, another highly erudite and prolific writer, who for many decades commented extensively on diplomatic, political and environmental issues, but never hesitated to break with conventional wisdom when he believed his arguments were in the right. Kissinger was a far less independent character than Kennan.

Despite his prolific corpus of writing on the subject, it is also difficult to regard Kissinger in quite the same light as Woodrow Wilson or the two Roosevelts, towering figures who, whatever they may have appropriated from the thinking of others, enunciated principles that had a massive impact on both the long-term intellectual direction of American foreign policy and the international image of the United States. And even among Secretaries of State, Dean Acheson, who, as he immodestly but not inaccurately proclaimed, was “present at the creation” of the Cold War international order, surely surpassed Kissinger in terms of sheer accomplishment and long-term impact. With all his ambition, energy, self-promotion, intelligence, and staggering literary output, in the longer term the historical verdict on Kissinger is likely to place him, not with those creative statesmen—Metternich, Bismarck, Churchill, Adenauer—he so admires, who reshaped the international order, but in the top level of the second rank, an exceedingly able executant who accepted rather than challenged or reshaped the prevailing conventional wisdom of his time.

**M**ario Del Pero's *The Eccentric Realist* concludes with the apposite observation that the demise of the neoconservative "moment" might be a temporal phenomenon, it "was not just a temporary folly, but the product of a political and strategic culture that remains more in tune with U.S. foreign policy tradition and history than Kissinger's eccentric realism" (152). Kissinger's strenuous efforts to inject a peculiar form of realism into U.S. foreign policy and discourse was very much designed to set the tone and regenerate consensus, centred on the U.S. national interest to preserve and recuperate its power and primacy enjoyed during the actual period of consensus in the first two decades after the war. That pursuit of an expanded national interest on the one hand moved too far toward accommodation with Moscow for Kissinger's opponents (and they were many), and on the other hand did not move far enough to really shift U.S. culture away from its "absolutist and moralistic"<sup>1</sup> attitudes. Kissinger's intention was not limited to that. He was primarily concerned with a regeneration of consensus. His "attention to the domestic dimension – the media, public opinion, and Congress – was obsessive and almost maniacal" (150). Del Pero's slim yet incisive book argues that, "In periods of difficulty, critical introspection, and domestic division, realist and anti-utopian formulas and codes tend to become more popular and acceptable" (5). Those codes, deftly deployed by Eisenhower in 1953 and by Barack Obama's frequent reference to Eisenhower, conjure up periods of readjustment, and of fiscal and foreign policy restraint. The discursive formulae comfort troubled audiences and provide a sense of reassurance after a traumatic event or period of prolonged and costly engagement whether in Korea, Vietnam, Iraq or Afghanistan. They implicitly suggest in Obama's reformulation that the only country worth building is the United States. But the question of the limits and the limited sphere of engagement that less eccentric realists such as George Kennan might advocate remained quite open. Indeed Del Pero argues that the discourse belied a globalism that prevailed in Kissinger's frame of mind and approach to the Soviet Union and that therefore his subordination of regional management, whether transatlantic or Sino-Soviet or the regional conflicts to the overall subordination to the global framework, derived from the Cold War, albeit now devoid of its ideological content. Of course, the standard narrative suggests that the Democrats, the supposed universalistic liberals, blew it. And the neoconservatives, augmenting their liberal predispositions against the realists, blew it again after 2003. Yet despite the return of some realist influences, the trends suggest that ultimately there lies a cultural attraction to the more exceptional United States; a power that worked its influence where it could, framed its work in universal terms, and cultivated that sense of the vindicator of its ideological foundations, frequently retold in mythical form. The ideal type might therefore be the combination of realism and restraint that Ronald Reagan practiced in terms of regional conflict with the indignant universal anger that fuelled and filled his rhetoric.

Kissinger's great project was not really to inject realism into U.S. foreign policy but to seemingly do so through the crafting and articulation of a discourse that engaged its

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<sup>1</sup> Del Pero is quoting Phil William's "Détente and US Domestic Politics," *International Affairs* 3 (Summer 1985): 437.

reference points but often eschewed the logical termini of its earlier political and academic content. So for instance, in 1971 he warned, “We must be wary both of the zealous ideologues who would overcommit us and of those who would withdraw us from meeting our legitimate responsibilities and interests.” This memorandum to the Staff Secretary provided a reflection on an op-ed by Robert Nisbet in the *Wall Street Journal*.<sup>2</sup> One of Del Pero’s arguments is that Kissinger was obsessively concerned with U.S. public opinion and with the domestic reading of foreign policy issues and events. Moreover, in part, this insular set of reflections that generated a flurry of memoranda in the executive branch and the beltway demonstrates the deep concern with the discussion and the “message” constructed and conveyed. Nisbet was writing about John Kenneth Galbraith’s article “Who Needs the Democrats” that asserted that “wars ... have come with devastating reliability” each time the Democrats are in power. According to Nisbet’s analysis, following William James, a dichotomy of mind, between the “tender” and the “tough” could be attributed to the intellectual (read woolly) Democrats and the tough (read practical, hard headed) realist Republicans. He argued: “Among modern intellectuals, further, there is a frequently observed fondness for the uses of power, especially centralized, bureaucratized power in service to large-scale moral objectives.” Moreover, “war is the supreme crisis,” that facilitated large-scale operations, engagements and “chronic political moralism.”<sup>3</sup> At the discursive level Kissinger, of course, advocated an “intelligent tough-mindedness” as antidote that would balance a realistic appreciation of the relationship between capabilities with rational aspirations.<sup>4</sup> Kissinger argued that the “tender-minded” strategists who took the United States into Vietnam failed because they did not probe “deeply enough into the substance of our options and emphasize[d] too much the formal structure of their thought.” Castigating the agents of such inclinations and clearly separating his own intellectual identity Kissinger concluded: “if we have learned to handle national security problems better today than ten years ago, I believe the credit must go to those who have stripped away moralisms that still suffocate our thinking ...”<sup>5</sup>

Del Pero’s Kissinger is eccentric because at least in one regard he failed to do this. Unlike Kennan and Hans Morgenthau, both critics of the U.S. involvement in the Vietnam War, Kissinger not only presided over its latter stages, but also was intent on refashioning a consensus centred on ongoing globalism and engagement. It is the generation of and operation within the discourse on limits and retrenchment rather than one of isolation that at once sought to ameliorate and placate U.S. audiences, public opinion, and congressional concern. In 1969 Kissinger recognised that there were prevalent feelings that the United

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<sup>2</sup> Henry A. Kissinger, memorandum for the Staff Secretary, The White House, n.d. NSC Files, Subject files, box 378, press, TV, news 1970-1971, vol. 1, Nixon Presidential Materials; see also Bruce Kuklick, *Blind Oracles: Intellectuals and War from Kennan to Kissinger*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006.

<sup>3</sup> Robert Nisbet, ‘War, Crisis and Intellectuals,’ *Wall Street Journal* (New York), 25 January 1971.

<sup>4</sup> Kissinger, op. cit.

<sup>5</sup> Henry A. Kissinger, Memorandum for Staff Secretary, National Security Council, 18 February 1971, NSC Files, Subject files, box 378, press, TV, news 1970-1971, vol. 1, Nixon Presidential Materials.

States was “over-committed”, yet the mood “of doubt and frustration,” was ultimately one that was “limitationist” rather than “isolationist”.<sup>6</sup>

It is this discourse and the presentation of policy that induces two problems for Kissinger. The first relates to the disposition to ultimately shun a real concern for limits by maintaining an intellectual and policy disposition that accentuated the bi-polar framework and subordinated other matters, whether transatlantic relations or the rapidly changing events in the Third World to the Cold War prism. Kissinger informed Nixon that “the increased fragmentation of power, the greater diffusion of political activity, and the more complicated patterns of international conflict and alignment that have emerged over the past decade have limited the capacity of the U.S. and USSR to control the effects of their influence and have revealed the limits of their capacity to control the actions of other governments” except through the direct application of military force. Yet simultaneously the United States had “discovered great obstacles to using military power directly to achieve political ends.”<sup>7</sup>

Del Pero convincingly and with an eye to the exaggerated differences in U.S. political discourse contends that: “wrapped in typical European realpolitik rhetoric, Kissinger’s argumentation was filled with slogans, explanations, and operative prescriptions of a peculiar American globalism that other realists – particularly George Kennan – explicitly contested.” Kissinger’s support for global intervention departed not that much from the symmetrical responses associated with Kennedy or for that matter stemming from the Cold War and from NSC 68. Yet given the limits on the use of force, Kissinger’s avoidance, which was actually criticism, of the primacy of economic theory and modernization, reduced the instruments of power he might have deployed in a wider setting than bi-lateral détente. Within this sphere, order and stability through the exercise of authority were the key objectives. He decried as the “Marshall Plan syndrome” the liberal belief in stability generated through economic prosperity (59-60).

The second problem relates to the domestic and political backlash he experienced precisely because of the manner in which he packaged his foreign policies whether under Nixon or Ford. It was the very discourse on limits, engagement and accommodation with the Soviets that raised the ire of the emerging neoconservatives and fuelled the rhetorical anger of Reagan. Though the historiography on the end of the Cold War remains contested terrain, some historical interpretations posit central agency to the kind of thinking that the Reagan conservatives and the neoconservatives injected into U.S. foreign policy during the 1980s. Obviously, realists such as Norman Graebner have a very different reading of the period, centred on the agency of Mikhail Gorbachev and other structural factors. Nevertheless, the point here is that culturally, the narrative on the end of the cold war as a derivative of Reagan’s foreign policy is widely accepted and frequently repeated. Moreover, and

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<sup>6</sup> Memorandum, Kissinger to Nixon, October 20, 1969, 41, *FRUS: Foundations of Foreign Policy, 1969-1972*, vol. 1, 125.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

crucially, that narrative includes the subtext of a U.S. engagement from a relative position of strength and that it was acceptable for Reagan to accommodate Gorbachev's concessions. For Kissinger, his critics exacerbated the problem precisely because accommodation with the "Soviet Union as equal" was not acceptable to his rising neoconservative opponents in the mid-1970s (151). Given the desire for a more absolutist and moralistic approach to U.S. foreign policy, the relativism adopted by Kissinger and even the discourse that resembled that realism were problematic to U.S. audiences that resisted the so-called "Europeanization" of U.S. diplomacy. His diplomatic engagement with Moscow was heavily criticised in a series of articles in *Commentary*. Theodore Draper described détente as an "unmitigated snare and delusion." Norman Podhoretz argued that Kissinger sounded like Churchill, but acted like Chamberlain.<sup>8</sup> Del Pero completes the neoconservative criticism: "Cautiousness became passivity; negotiations were presented as capitulation; détente became synonymous with appeasement" (151).

Yet Kissinger's quest for stability and order through authority and superpower management fell apart in places like Angola. At first he was quick to anger at the Soviets and the Cubans for what he regarded as a violation of détente's spirit, and later at members of Congress, those who voted with Senators Dick Clark and John Tunney, as appeasers. The atmosphere is caught well in memoranda of conversation between Gerald Ford and Daniel Patrick Moynihan:

Ford: "Congress has lost its guts – they have cut and run and we need them on the record. No one who voted no can tell me to get tough with the Soviet Union. There is a lot of talk but no guts." Moynihan responded: "... the way to deal with it is not to confirm our pacifism but to reverse it. ... We could make it the counterpart of Vietnam – there our blue eyes were shooting the natives, now it is their blue eyes shooting the blacks." Ford: "But I think we first have to get them pinned down so the people know who won't stand up for the United States." Moynihan: "You want to attack some Congressmen – I want to attack the Soviet Union."<sup>9</sup>

Despite Nathaniel Davis' earlier advice that the U.S. could not prevail in what was looming as a protracted conflict, and despite the explicit identification of a very limited set of U.S. interests in Angola (limited U.S. direct investment, oil and minerals), Kissinger was intent on situating a concern with U.S. credibility – replete in the documentation of the time – with realism and the image of U.S. power. In that sense, the more traditional associations of realism with the national interest were undermined by an expansive and discursive intent for the use of realism from the late 1960s to the mid-1970s. Kissinger, according to Del Pero, cultivated an image rather than engaged in a consistent practice of its tenets; as

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<sup>8</sup> Draper and Podhoretz cited by H.W. Brands, *What America Owes the World: The Struggle for the Soul of Foreign Policy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 266-7.

<sup>9</sup> Memorandum of Conversation, Ford, Moynihan, Scowcroft, January 27, 1976, NSA, box 17, Gerald R. Ford Library.

far as credibility, globalism and interdependence were concerned he was not that far removed from the foreign policy forebears springing from Wilsonian traditions (74).

His eccentric realism perhaps departed from the universalistic moralism, the “tender” minded proclivity to engage in transformative global agendas. His global concerns, his concerns with U.S. credibility arising out of any global setback, were very much a part of the transitions of the late 1940s away from Kennan’s selective realism to the global constructs created thereafter. The standard reading of ‘Kissinger as realist’ needs to be contested. Del Pero does a fine job of this. His argument forces us to rethink the differences between the universalistic aspirations of some early Cold War policies, the globalism of Kissinger’s bi-polar Cold War framework, (albeit devoid of the central ideological content that drove the earlier Democratic administrations) and the later neoconservative agendas. Del Pero writes: “By thinking that a realist transformation in U.S. foreign policy discourse was possible and that a new domestic consensus would be attained through it, Kissinger proved to be singularly unrealistic” (9).

While Kissinger, Kissingerism and realism are superbly deconstructed it is also relevant to consider the limits of neoconservatism and the realism of its foreign policies as discussed by Maria Ryan’s *Neoconservatives and the New American Century* (2010), which argues that despite the broad rhetoric and particular projects its policies were always tempered by a realism that recognised the limits of the unipolar and the primacy of U.S. power in the face of the real counterweights that existed in the era between Berlin and Baghdad. Del Pero’s concluding thought on the temporality of the neoconservative’s decline despite their successful opposition to Kissingeresque détente and accommodation can be tempered by Ryan’s observation on the spatial limits of their agenda.

“There are only two ways it can go,” Henry Kissinger mused. “Either the military will take over, or the left wing will take over ... it will begin to polarize between the extreme Left and the military. Then the military will move against the extreme Left, or the extreme Left will pre-empt it”.<sup>1</sup> It was July 1974. Kissinger was pondering the complex situation in Portugal, following the peaceful demise of the authoritarian regime of Marcelo Caetano, which he and Richard Nixon had vainly tried to buttress, support and re-legitimate with the Atlantic allies and U.S. public opinion. The prediction of the National Security Advisor/Secretary of State was simplistic and binary: once again it was the radical Left vs. the military, in Portugal as everywhere. But Kissinger's analysis was not just simplistic; it was also completely off-target. Part of the military was, in fact, the extreme Left; the non-communist left, led by Mario Soares - the “Portuguese Kerensky” (Kissinger's phrase) - was able to stand up to the Communist challenge; the armed forces had split in various factions; shifting alliances between these factions and the parties were formed. In the end, Kissinger was proved wrong. There was neither a military nor a communist take-over. The post-revolutionary transition led Portugal to democracy, into the European Community and towards unprecedented prosperity (at least until the financial crash of 2008). In Portugal there was no Augusto Pinochet or Salvador Allende – the Chilean precedent to which Kissinger kept referring throughout the chaotic Portuguese transition.

Meanwhile, other Southern European countries appeared vulnerable to communist penetration. One of them was Italy, which was facing a complicated economic situation and the difficult choices that ensued. The reformed Italian Communist Party (PCI, *Partito Comunista Italiano*) seemed to be on the verge of re-entering the government for the first time since 1947. The PCI's leader, Enrico Berlinguer, made clear his willingness to participate in a government led by the Christian Democrats (DC, *Democrazia Cristiana*), the ruling party since the end of World War II. Many, in the U.S. and Europe, were not hostile to this sort of Italian *Große Koalition*, aptly renamed “historical compromise” (*compromesso storico*). The Italian Communist caterpillar, it was argued (wrongly), was turning into a Western European Social Democratic butterfly. The break with Moscow was inevitable: the U.S. and its European allies should favor this process, facilitating the PCI's evolution and its detachment from the Soviet master. As always, Kissinger knew better: he accepted (wrongly) the possibility that the PCI had become truly independent from Moscow. This, however, made Italian communists only more dangerous: “it doesn't make any difference

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<sup>1</sup> Meeting of Secretary of State's Staff, 10 July, 1974, National Archives and Record Administration (NARA), General Records of the Department of State (RG 59), Lot File 78D443 (Transcripts of Secretary of State Henry Kissinger's Staff Meetings, 1973-1977), Box 4. I have dealt with Kissinger's response to the Portuguese crisis in “Which Chile, Allende? Henry Kissinger and the Portuguese Revolution”, *Cold War History*, forthcoming; “A European Solution for a European Crisis. The International Implications of Portugal's Revolution”, *Journal of European Integration History*, 15:1, 2009: 15-34 and “La transizione portoghese” [The Portuguese Transition] in Mario Del Pero, Víctor Gavín, Fernando Guirao and Antonio Varsori *Democrazie. L'Europa meridionale e la fine delle dittature* [Democracies. Southern Europe and the End of Dictatorships] (Rome: Le Monnier, 2010).

whether they [the Western European Communist parties] are controlled by Moscow or not”, Kissinger maintained. “It will unravel NATO and the European community into a neutralist instrument. And that is the essence of it. Whether or not these parties are controlled from Moscow - that’s a subsidiary issue ... we keep saying that there’s no conclusive evidence that they are not under the control of Moscow, implying that if we could show they were not under the control of Moscow, we could find them acceptable ... A Western Europe with the participation of communist parties is going to change the basis of NATO ... to bring the communists into power in Western Europe ... would totally reorient the map of postwar Europe”.<sup>2</sup> Kissinger directed his arrows particularly against the DC leader, Aldo Moro (later killed by the Red Brigades), who seemed more keen on the *compromesso storico*. Moro believed – correctly and indeed quite cynically – that including the Communists as junior partners in a coalition government would make them co-responsible for the hard choices Italy had to take. It was a way of preventing them from capitalizing politically on the unpopularity of such choices and eroding their consensus. A version of this policy was later successfully tested. Co-opting the enemy to weaken it was indeed part of the Politics 101 playbook. Kissinger didn’t buy it and explicitly scorned Moro during a meeting with his staff: “Somebody has to explain to me the significance of Moro in Italian politics. It’s beyond my comprehension. I’ve never seen him awake”.<sup>3</sup>

When I first began working on U.S. policy in Southern Europe during the 1970s I had few certainties, as is often the case when one embarks on a new research project. One of them, however, was that Kissinger had brought to U.S. foreign policy unprecedented coherence and sophistication. He was no William Rogers (or, for that matter, Dean Rusk). He wasn’t influenced by the formalistic legalism embraced by many of his predecessors. He knew history and the lessons it provided to statesmen; could be blunt and acidic, but never rough and simplistic. Kissinger – to use a word he loved (and loves) – would “conceptualize” strategies, problems and dilemmas. Working in the archives offered a major, indeed shocking, surprise, which the abovementioned examples of Italy and Portugal - Moro and Soares - clearly highlight. During his tenure as National Security Advisor and Secretary of State, Kissinger was often intellectually lazy and sloppy; he followed instinct and prejudice more than expertise and knowledge. Far too often we had mistaken his arrogance for sophistication; his uni-dimensional view of power for coherence; his roughness for directness; his simplicity for boldness.

So, I temporarily left on hold my research on Southern Europe and – originally out of necessity (sometimes books have to be written even if you don’t intend to) – I decided to write a “long essay” on Kissinger and the Kissinger mythology. I read systematically his books, as I had not done before, finding them strikingly unoriginal (although Kissinger’s prose is quite something and would deserve a study in itself). I tried to make sense of his diplomatic approach. I followed the public and political debate within the U.S. in the late

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<sup>2</sup> Meeting Secretary of State’s Staff, January 12, 1975 and July 1, 1976, NARA, RG59, Lot File 78D443, Box 6 and Box 10.

<sup>3</sup> Meeting Secretary of State’s Staff, January 12, 1975, NARA, RG59, Lot File 78D443, Box 6.

1960s and early 1970s, only to discover that the courageous statesman willing to tell America what no-one had told it before was ... well, telling instead what it badly wanted to hear in those specific, historical circumstances. That's what the "Eccentric Realist" ("Henry Kissinger and the Rise of the Neoconservatives" in the Italian 2006 version) was about: a modest attempt to debunk the Kissinger mythology.

Of course, an interpretative essay of this kind is vulnerable to attack. I thus sighed with relief when I read the comments of the four reviewers, whom – along with editors of H-Diplo – I heartily thank for having made this roundtable possible. They are fair in their criticism and generous, possibly even too generous, in their praise. I will start with Alessandro Brogi, in honor of alphabet, not nationality. Brogi makes, I think, two main objections to my argument. The first – which I find convincing – is that I pay insufficient attention to the excessive expectations generated by Kissinger's globalism and how these unfulfilled expectations backfired when "détente seemingly failed to contain or roll back the communist enemy". I tried to highlight the many contradictions of Kissinger's foreign policy approach and discourse, but I should have certainly paid more attention to this aspect. I find less persuasive Brogi's second critique, namely that I "confuse multipolarity with genuine political pluralism". I don't think Kissinger paid particular attention to either of them. He did not realistically believe in a transformation of the international system towards multipolarity; he was convinced that the bipolar status quo in Europe worked to the advantage of the United States; he did not find, in his binary outlook, room to accommodate "political pluralism", when this could not be exploited for Cold War purposes. The same example used by Brogi is, I believe, quite misleading. Economics was for Kissinger always subordinated to geopolitics; and 1975 was a peculiar moment, when the United States needed as never before the diplomatic support of its European allies, particularly in Southern Europe.

I am glad that T. Christopher Jespersen appreciated the *Eccentric Realist* and am flattered by his comments on my "fluid writing" and entertaining footnotes. However, I am afraid he overrates me when, at the end of his commentary, he argues that I "know better" and should have dealt more with Kissinger's "deviousness ... nastiness, and ... ability and desire to justify brutality." In all frankness, I don't think I know better than the many scholars and journalists who have already discussed, dissected and lambasted Kissinger "the war criminal". I could have added little to what has already been said. I must admit, however, that I am also not particularly fascinated by this aspect of the Kissinger saga. Possibly because, as I said, it has already been explored; certainly, because I think that concentrating on it produces neither productive nor helpful scholarship. I am afraid that, by the same standards, few post-1945 World leaders – U.S. and not – would escape the accusation of being somehow responsible of war crimes (why Kissinger and not Robert McNamara? Why Ghaddafi in 2011 and not in 2007 or 2009, when – escorted by his notorious Amazon bodyguards – he planted his tent in the centre of Paris and Rome, and dallied with the then welcoming, and now bombing, Nicolas Sarkozy and Silvio Berlusconi, the latter indulging even in an ostentatious hand-kissing?).

Priscilla Roberts's long commentary – almost an essay in itself – touches upon many different issues and makes several good points. Roberts presents my work as

“dispassionate”: a definition, however, that I need to qualify. In the “Eccentric Realist” I have tried to discuss as honestly as possible a topic – Kissinger and the Kissinger mythology – I indeed feel very passionate about. As I said, it was out of disappointment, sometimes bordering on anger, that I wrote this book. Having said that, I found the comments of Roberts on the peculiarities of U.S. realism particularly important. I partially disagree with her, though, when in the last part of her commentary she stresses the continuity between Kissinger’s policies and those of the Jimmy Carter and Ronald Reagan administrations (to the point of arguing that “Kissinger’s successors were” possibly “more timid than he had been”). As I tried to make clear in my book, what I found quite unique in the Richard Nixon/Kissinger years were not the decisions taken or policies pursued, but the kind of discourse deployed to justify and sell them: the narrative used to build the necessary consensus around such choices and policies. On this aspect the difference between the years Kissinger was in power and those following (or preceding) them is, in my view, truly striking.

David Ryan, finally, mentions one problem (and risk) that always affects the work of historians, influencing the topic we choose as well as the interpretations we offer. That problem is ‘presentism’: namely, the tendency to read history through very contemporary lenses. This risk is even more acute when we deal with very recent events, such as those discussed in the “Eccentric Realist”. It is partially inevitable. “Every true history is contemporary history” as Benedetto Croce once quipped. Published in early 2006, the Italian edition of the “Eccentric Realist” was written in 2004-5, during the zenith of a new neoconservative moment, soon destined to collapse ignominiously. Hence, my propensity to stress the *longue durée* of a creed, the neoconservative-exceptionalist one, which I found well entrenched in U.S. political culture and public discourse; hence, my emphasis on the parenthetical nature of the Kissingeresque-realist discursive turn of the late 1960s and early 1970s. I might have been wrong. I nevertheless urge everyone to go back to the debate of the 1970s, read Kissinger’s public speeches and private memos, and compare them to the public speeches and private correspondence of other statesmen in recent U.S. history. I am sure many will agree with me in finding Kissinger’s discourse, indeed his realism, strikingly peculiar and, perhaps, even a little eccentric.

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