

# A Fear and Loathing of Detente: Perspectives on Criticisms of Henry Kissinger in The National Review and The New Republic

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## **Abstract**

*As National Security Advisor and (later) Secretary of State under Presidents Richard Nixon and Gerald R. Ford, Dr. Henry A. Kissinger was responsible for crafting policies aimed both at a diplomatic rapprochement with mainland China and seeking a strategic accommodation with the Soviet Union. However, many critics of this policy maintained that détente was a nouveau form of appeasement under an elaborate geopolitical scheme. One of the main targets of the Right was Kissinger who was believed to be the intellectual godfather of the Nixon and Ford foreign policy stratagems.*

*This paper is a general analysis of the criticisms of Henry Kissinger in The National Review and The New Republic between 1970 and 1976. While their criticisms were salient among many voters and critics, writers often overstated and oversimplified many of the key areas of their disagreements with Kissinger on the overall détente policy.*

*This paper has been peer reviewed*

## INTRODUCTION

From his arrival on the national political scene as an advisor to Nelson Rockefeller's presidential campaign in 1968 to serving as President Richard Nixon's National Security Advisor from 1969 to 1973, and during his tenure as the nation's fifty sixth Secretary of State from 1973 to 1977, Henry Kissinger was both a controversial figure and one of the most significant voices in American foreign policy making. A product of Harvard University, as well as a prominent former faculty member, Kissinger's views on the relationship between balance of power politics to a pragmatic form of Cold War diplomacy earned him admirers across the U.S.A. political spectrum. However, Kissinger's practical and non-ideological approaches to international relations earned him his fair share of critics who viewed his diplomatic style as arrogant, naïve, and trending on a dangerous form of appeasement.<sup>1</sup>

Whether the issues centered on the rapprochement to China, negotiating arms control agreements with the Soviet Union, or his alleged 'snubbing' of Soviet dissident Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, Kissinger's critics were quick to point out the fact that the Nixon/Kissinger approach had an expressed 'proclivity to project regional situations onto a global scale.'<sup>2</sup> Similarly, his detractors claimed that Kissinger frequently engaged in a cynical and self-serving misreading of history in the formation of policy conclusions. This, coupled with Kissinger's frequent use of diplomatic secrecy, was considered both disingenuous and threatening to the vital security interests of the United States.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Harvey Starr, "The Kissinger Years: Studying Individuals and Foreign Policy," *International Studies Quarterly*, 24, 4, December (1980): 491; Steven F. Hayward, *The Age of Reagan: The Fall of the Old Liberal Order, 1964-1980*, (Roseville, California: Prima Publishing: 2001), 441.

<sup>2</sup> James Chace, "A Gravely Flawed Foreign Policy: The Kissinger Years," *New Republic*, 9 November (1974): 31, 33.

<sup>3</sup> Robert Hotz, "Editorial: The Case Against Kissinger," *Aviation Week and Space Technology*, 8 December (1975): 7; James Mann, *The Rebellion of Ronald Reagan: A History of the End of the Cold War* (Viking: New York, 2009), 20-24; John Lewis

Moreover, Kissinger's bold personal charisma was emblematic of the fallacy of his approach to foreign relations. In short, he was viewed by many of his disparagers as a cynical opportunist. For instance, in one editorial in the *Atlantic Monthly*, Thomas Griffith stated that, 'Kissinger is a man fascinated by power, a student of it, a ruthless seeker of it, a respecter of others who have it, a skilled wielder of it, and sometimes, alas, a man intoxicated by it.' Griffith also surmised that '[Kissinger] is an unabashed balance of power man who believes that 'without the ultimate sanction of power, conciliation becomes surrender'.<sup>4</sup>

Furthermore, Kissinger was frequently accused of pretentiously casting himself in the same intellectual/influential light as such great historical figures as Great Britain's Viscount Robert Castlereagh and Austria's Klemens Von Metternich - of the 1815 Congress of Vienna fame - as well as his own contemporary influential colleague, French President Charles De Gaulle.<sup>5</sup> Such delusions and egomaniacal comparisons, Kissinger's most vocal opponents argued, were the sources of his policy construction. Many writers maintained that his inflated persona enabled him to have undue influence on Presidents Richard Nixon and Gerald Ford, endangering U.S. national security objectives even further.

At the forefront of much of the criticism aimed at Kissinger were well noted national publications whose contemptuous musings pointed towards what the contributors believed to be the essential failings of détente; of particular interest were *The National Review* and *The New Republic*.

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Gaddis, *The Cold War: A New History* (New York: The Penguin Press, 2005), 184; Eric Patrick Gilliland, "Richard Nixon, Détente, and the Conservative Movement, 1969-1974," Master's thesis, December 2006.

<sup>4</sup> Thomas Griffith, "Party of One: Judging Kissinger," *Atlantic Monthly*, July (1976): 22.

<sup>5</sup> Joseph Craft, "In Search of Kissinger," *Harper's Magazine*, January (1971): 58.

The former magazine was established in 1955 by conservative author and intellectual William F. Buckley, Jr. For many decades, Buckley's magazine served up a regular dose of conservative pieces and served as a major conduit of intellectually based ideas for the political and scholarly Right. While *The New Republic*, founded in 1914, was not as nearly conservative in its outlook as its younger counterpart, it nevertheless published works that took a hard line stance on the pursuit of American foreign policy objectives. In many of the works published by these two journals, historians are able to uncover a significant number of harsh criticisms of Kissinger, as well as the collective fallacies that underscored them.

While the proverbial 'buck' stopped in the Oval Office, Kissinger became the principal symbol of the policies of the Nixon/Ford years as the presidency seemed embattled from the ravages of the post-Vietnam War era and the Watergate Scandal.<sup>6</sup> Thus, Henry Kissinger receives a significant amount of criticism from many of the two journals' more prolific writers.

This study seeks to examine the criticisms of Henry Kissinger in those two influential periodicals published throughout the 1970s. The research includes a general yet analytical discussion of the ideological motivations underlying the vehement condemnation of his approach to diplomacy. Contextually, this article focuses upon three distinct policy areas in which Kissinger drew the heaviest criticisms from various writers ranging from its overall approaches to U.S. foreign relations, the rapprochement with China, and U.S. Soviet relations over Eastern Europe.

Consequently, this article will contribute a historical and contextual dimension to the literature on Henry Kissinger and his approach to foreign policy as it clearly points to how an ideological and

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<sup>6</sup> Alastair Buchan, "The Irony of Henry Kissinger," *International Affairs*, 50, 3, July (1974): 367. See also, Roger Morris, *Uncertain Greatness: Henry Kissinger and American Foreign Policy*, (New York: Harper and Row, 1977), 193-201, 269-270; Jussi Hanhimäki, *The Flawed Architect: Henry Kissinger and American Foreign Policy*, (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 301.

pragmatic basis for criticism foreign policy decisions was often aired out in the public light. Likewise, it will also point out that this overly critical type of discourse was also simplistic in its approach to the intricacies of late Cold War diplomacy, as later events clearly vindicated Kissinger's approach to foreign policy crises and opportunities.

### **Kissingerian Approaches to U.S. Foreign Relations**

The Cold War era policies of the Nixon and Ford Administrations were a significant departure from that of the last Republican president, Dwight Eisenhower, in that Washington's bombastic confrontations with Moscow were not rooted in either nuclear brinksmanship or in ideological dogma. Instead, the policies of the late 1960s to the mid 1970s were constructed on mutual interests between East and West and the slow, but steady, relaxation of tensions between Foggy Bottom and the Kremlin. This experimental approach, critics argued, smacked of appeasement but only under a fancy name: *détente*.<sup>7</sup> And to them, this novel approach to diplomacy was politically unacceptable and harmful to U.S.A. vital interests. However, the world that Richard Nixon and Henry Kissinger inherited on January 29, 1969 was quickly evolving to the point that a new approach would possibly meet the demands of the changing nature of international politics.

The United States was losing the war in Vietnam. During the 1968 campaign, Nixon promised 'peace with honor', but not a unilateral retreat that would endanger U.S.A. diplomatic credibility. In fact, the new West German Chancellor Willy Brandt began a policy specifically aimed at improving relations with his country's eastern counterpart in East Berlin. The Sino- Soviet split, which had been

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<sup>7</sup> For a thorough critique of the overall policy see Daniel Yergin, "In Faint Praise of Détente," *The New Republic*, 29 May (1976): 17-21; Robert Beisner, "History and Henry Kissinger," *Diplomatic History*, 14 (1990), 525; Richard Stevenson, *The Rise and Fall of Détente: Relaxations of Tension in U.S. Soviet Relations, 1953-84* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1985), 177.

simmering since Nikita Khrushchev's famous speech denouncing the 'crimes of Stalin' in 1956, had reached a high point as a border dispute along the Ussuri River region thirteen years later could have resulted in an all out war.

It was into this rather contentious environment that National Security Advisor Henry Kissinger began to plot his stratagems for a transformative foreign policy that relied less on overwhelming military superiority, but on exploiting new opportunities that could further the U.S. geopolitical interests. The United States, he surmised, would continue to build upon the framework of the Nuclear Test Ban Treaty (1963), the spirit of the 1967 Glassboro Summit between President Lyndon Johnson and Soviet President Alexis Kosygin, as well as the 1968 Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, by initiating the SALT talks aimed at reducing nuclear stockpiles. Furthermore, the U.S.A. would maintain its diplomatic commitment to protecting the sovereignty of Europe, while at the same time, having influence on the progress of West German Chancellor Brandt's *Ostpolitik* of improving relations with its East German counterpart, albeit on Washington's terms.

Consequently, Nixon and Kissinger wanted to end the war in Vietnam responsibly and gradually while working towards a cordial policy with Beijing short of full diplomatic recognition. Each of these policies would drive a proverbial wedge in the Soviet-based Eastern alliance, thereby giving the United States an opportunity to extricate realistic diplomatic and strategic concessions from the Communist Bloc. From Nixon and Kissinger's perspective these objectives were the essence of triangular diplomacy.<sup>8</sup>

Kissinger's critics in the printed press, however, had a different view. They held that these policies smacked of naivety and pedantic pretention masked as sound diplomacy. Writing for the *New Republic*, James Chace questioned the efficacy of the triangular

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<sup>8</sup> Henry A. Kissinger, *Diplomacy*, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1994), 703-732.

approach as failing to answer key questions about the ultimate objective: to force the Communist Bloc and the

Western World to abide by rules and norms established on neo-Metternich approaches, where such seemingly pretentious historical and contextual political parallels were sorely lacking.<sup>9</sup> Moreover, Chace suggested that Kissinger's own miscalculations regarding Soviet intentions at the SALT bargaining table, the prolonging of the War in Vietnam, and general lack of strategic planning had the net effect of resulting in a bungled and misdirected foreign policy. This phenomenon, coupled with Kissinger's own (deliberate?) misreading of Charles DeGaulle's notion approaching *détente* with the Soviet Union from a gradual perspective, rather than focusing upon cooperation as a starting point, made Kissinger's motives not only suspect, but potentially fatal to U.S. credibility in the long term. Chace concludes:

While the Wilsonian zeal to remake the world in the American image too often characterized our actions in the era of the Cold War, we must also guard against pursuing a policy in Kissinger's own words, 'empty of vision and humanity.' Not to transcend the excessively pragmatic can give rise to a policy mired in expediency, with incalculable destructive costs. Henry Kissinger once wrote in his study of 19<sup>th</sup> Century diplomacy that 'the acid test of a policy, however, is its ability to obtain domestic support.' He was wrong. The true test of a foreign policy is not of its short term support but its long term consequences.<sup>10</sup>

From Chace's perspective, Kissinger's dubious and bookish foreign policy served a golden opportunity to engage in an esoteric intellectual exercise.

*The New Republic's* John Osborne was no less critical of this unique style of diplomacy even in the early days when Kissinger served as the President's National Security Advisor. In a 1970 article he not only accused Kissinger of being an arrogant technocrat, but of being

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<sup>9</sup> James Chace, "A Gravely Flawed Foreign Policy: The Kissinger Years," 31, 33.

<sup>10</sup> Chace, "A Gravely Flawed Foreign Policy: The Kissinger Years," 31, 33.

an overbearing ogre. Osborne argued that Kissinger not only overshadowed Secretary of State William Rogers, but that he had made it his stock and trade to sabotage Rogers' role and to micromanage United States foreign policy objectives to suit his intellectual fancy. Osborne maintains:

Kissinger has served Nixon, as among other things, his surrogate brutalitarian. Whether the President has really given foreign policy 'a new direction' is questionable. But there can be no question that the brutality has had much if not all of the desired effect upon its principal target, the bureaucracy of the Department of State. A humbler and more quiescent lot of departmental officials is not to be found in Washington.

He adds:

[State] Department officers who all but hissed when they said 'Kissinger' now speak of 'Henry' in the tone of intimacy that is heard when members of his own staff talk about him. The department bureaucracy has recognized the fact that 'Henry' is indeed a surrogate, speaking and acting for the President along lines and through organizational channels that Nixon conceived for himself and authorized Kissinger to implement in structural detail. 'This is the way the President wants it,' State's people tell each other. The nature of officialdom being what it is, what a President is known to want is more acceptable than anything a mere staff subordinate, however eminent, is supposed to want.<sup>11</sup>

Thus, Osborne suggested that major decisions ranging from the SALT Talks, the formulation of a "China paper", and the Arab-Israeli conflict to smaller tasks (e.g. coordinating routine meetings of key national security staff) would become part and parcel of a Kissingerian power grab.<sup>12</sup>

*The National Review's* Richard Whalen addressed similar concerns about what he considered Kissinger's grandiosity and flawed

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<sup>11</sup> John Osborne, "The Nixon Watch: Henry's Wonderful Machine," *The New Republic*, 31 January (1970):12-13.

<sup>12</sup> Osborne, "The Nixon Watch: Henry's Wonderful Machine," 12-13.



diplomacy. In a September 14, 1973 column written during the height of the Watergate Scandal, he leveled criticism that linked negative perceptions of the Nixon presidency to the notion that the country's national security interests were consequently vulnerable. He writes:

The Nixon-Kissinger foreign policy is the kinkiest since Franklin Roosevelt and Harry Hopkins redrew the map of the world upstairs at the White House. The latter pair at least had the excuse of a global war for their oversights and in any event they admitted to being amateurs. Nixon and Kissinger, the coolly professional technicians, are bumblers on a far grander scale. They have conceived and executed in deepest secrecy a policy avowedly based on enduring national interests, yet characterized by sudden and sometimes ruthlessly unpredictable spasms of unilateral whim. They have detached themselves from the American public, the Congress, the foreign policy establishment, and many of our allies, and have behaved in a manner more appropriate to a totalitarian state than a democratic republic at the heart of a worldwide security and economic system.<sup>13</sup>

In essence, Whalen maintained that the policies of the Nixon/Kissinger years could be described as steeped in deceit, laced with cheeky grandiosity, and peppered with a cynical secrecy so vast that U.S.A. ideals were obfuscated by political expediency.

Furthermore, Whalen characterized Henry Kissinger as Nixon's 'one-man foreign ministry' in order to place the entire onus on the execution of such failed objectives on the Secretary of State. Hence, he described Kissinger in the most virulent of terms as 'an Unassimilated - a European by heritage and cultural choice, a cosmopolitan by circumstance, an American by deliberate (and hazardous) calculation.'<sup>14</sup> Hence, he concludes that Kissinger's *détente* only emboldened Soviet expansionist aims and allowed the

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<sup>13</sup> Richard J. Whalen, "A Foreign Policy without A Country," *National Review*, 13 September (1973): 1005.

<sup>14</sup> Whalen, "A Foreign Policy without A Country," 1005.

Chinese to become opportunistic parasites on the U.S.A.' good will, thus threatening the stability of the international order even further.

### **Betrayal and Naivety: The Rapprochement with China**

President Richard Nixon's dramatic opening to China in 1972 was considered by many writers as the flagrant betrayal of one national friend, Taiwan, and the embracing of a sworn enemy, Mao Tse-tung. This diplomatic venture, coupled with their general unease about the SALT Talks with the Soviets, gave the impression that Nixon's (read: Kissinger's) diplomatic style was based upon naivety and thus set a dangerous diplomatic precedent in future dealings with the Communist world.<sup>15</sup>

Perhaps some of the most scathing criticisms of Kissinger came in the Summer and Fall of 1971 when as National Security Advisor, he secretly traveled to Beijing in June to meet with his counterpart, Chou En Lai, to begin the process of easing tensions between their two countries and to arrange a possible visit by President Nixon. The intent of this visit would be to bridge the vast diplomatic gap between the U.S. and China, thus capitalizing on the Sino-Soviet split and forcing the Soviet Union to make greater concessions at the arms control bargaining table. This intricate and neo-Metternichian form of wedge politics was considered by many of the Administration's supporters (especially liberal Democrats and moderate Republicans) to be Kissinger's diplomatic genius at its zenith.

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<sup>15</sup> See, Jussi Hanhimaki, *The Flawed Architect: Henry Kissinger and American Foreign Policy*, 300; Robert Dallek, *Nixon and Kissinger: Partners in Power*, (New York: Harper Collins, 2007), 303-305; Norman A. Graebner, "Henry Kissinger and American Foreign Policy: A Contemporary Appraisal," *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, 22, 1, 28 June (2008): 12; Harvey Starr, "The Kissinger Years: Studying Individuals and Foreign Policy," *International Studies Quarterly*, 24, 4 December (1980): 491; Phil Williams, "The Limits of American Power: From Nixon to Reagan," *International Affairs*, 63, 4, Autumn (1987):, 576-577.

However, many opinion writers found this particular mission to be problematic for two key reasons. First, it deeply troubled conservative columnists whose zeal motivated them to admonish the Administration for cavorting with an untrustworthy Moscow (**and** Beijing) thus betraying American ideals.<sup>16</sup> This would mean (at best) the leadership of the U.S. kowtowing to an avowed enemy or (at worse) the visit could lead to full diplomatic recognition to the chagrin of Taipei.<sup>17</sup> And secondly, this risky approach to China, many critics alleged, was based upon the same faulty premises as was détente with the Soviet Union; the notion that Beijing would also “play nice” with the United States.<sup>18</sup>

But perhaps the most galling aspect of this strategy was the tightly knit secrecy involved in the planning and execution of Kissinger’s 1971 trip to Beijing. In their opinion such a mission fraught with risks that would undercut U.S.A. credibility should the overall objective towards rapprochement fall short. In fact, one writer for the *National Review* alleged that Kissinger had played the fool to Mao and Chou as the Chinese government and media issued hateful criticisms of the U.S.A. in their media during and after Kissinger’s visit. Opinion writer Karl Baarslag wrote an article, “Peking’s Other Face” that essentially accused Kissinger of being made a dupe by the Chinese and forever tarnishing the nation’s credibility. Moreover, he reported that Chinese radio and television broadcasts were accusing the United States of murdering innocent Vietnamese citizens and called President Nixon, a ‘belligerent god of plague’ and an ‘imperialist gangster.’<sup>19</sup> Thus, Baarslag concluded, that Beijing was totally untrustworthy and that Kissinger was critically naïve.

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<sup>16</sup> Anne H. Cahn, *Killing Détente: The Right Attacks the CIA*, (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1998), 26-27.

<sup>17</sup> Hanhimaki, *The Flawed Architect: Henry Kissinger and American Foreign Policy*, 166-168;

<sup>18</sup> Williams, “The Limits of American Power: From Nixon to Reagan,” 576-577.

<sup>19</sup> Karl Baarslag, “Peking’s Other Face,” *National Review*, 10 September (1971): 991, 1007.

*The National Review's* Founder William F. Buckley, Jr. echoed similar concerns on purely diplomatic and strategic grounds. Long a supporter of Taiwan and its longtime leader Chiang Kai-shek, Buckley expressed tremendous angst as he perceived that the special relationship that Washington had with Taipei was about to be sacrificed on the altar of *détente*, and that the “China seat” on the United Nations Security Council was going to be awarded to an intransigent adversary. Additionally, Buckley’s critique was similar to Baarslag’s in the sense that he maintained the Kissinger was made the foil by Chou and that the U.S. received nothing in return during its secret talks in Beijing, particularly over the ‘One China policy’ and the UN question. Buckley writes:

It is clear that the objective of the Nixon Administration, at this point, is *détente* with Red China. If we have reason to believe that Red China will be ultimately intransigent, then there is reason to put less than total pressure on Taiwan. In other words, there is official reason to hope, however surreptitiously, that Taiwan will indeed walk out of the UN, leaving moot the question of kicking her out. That way, the U.S. Government would have put up a public fight for her old friend, and, lugubriously, lost; because of our friend’s obduracy. And Red China....having won the day.<sup>20</sup>

In his continuing swipe at Kissinger regarding shifting Nixon/Kissinger’s shifting policy toward Taipei and new relationship with Beijing, Buckley concludes, “If we really desire Taiwan out, that means that at Peking, Chou En-lai did not give Henry Kissinger even one one-hundredth of a bloom.”<sup>21</sup>

Similarly, the editorial board of *The New Republic*, intoned that the Kissinger trip was emblematic of the Nixon Administration’s overall misdirected idealism in its embrace of China, and its rejection of Taiwan’s decades’ long friendship. Without directly

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<sup>20</sup> William F. Buckley, Jr., “On the Right: The Secretary of State Marches On.” *National Review*, September 24, 1971, 948.

<sup>21</sup> William F. Buckley, Jr., “On the Right: The Secretary of State Marches On,” 948.

mentioning Kissinger by name, the journal charged that this gutsy form of reconciliation lacked a realistic perspective on the great antagonism that Washington and Beijing had carried against each other since 1949, and that to pursue improved relations on the basis of a secret and short meeting was a mistake. It writes:

Twenty-two years of mutual hostility are not to be blown away by the first breeze. National interests long considered antagonistic are not to be reconciled quickly. It was only four years ago that Secretary of State (Dean) Rusk, defending a hold-fast position in Vietnam, warned that ‘within the decade or two, there will be a billion Chinese on the mainland, armed with nuclear weapons, with no certainty about what their attitude will be.’ He found it ominous to contemplate the world cut in two by Asian communism, reaching out throughout Southeast Asia.<sup>22</sup>

In this dire warning, the editors of *The New Republic* suggested that the ‘Red’ Chinese could not be totally trusted and that the Nixon Administration should precede in relations with Beijing with extreme caution.

Indeed, President Nixon’s trip to China in late February, 1972 signaled a new direction for *détente* in that Washington and Beijing were at least on speaking terms and it forced the Soviet Union to take the SALT talks seriously enough to make some key concessions. The mission also emboldened the Nixon re-election campaign to promote the image of Nixon as peacemaker, and it promoted Henry Kissinger as a brilliant strategist, tactician and diplomat, much to the vexation of various writers.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> “Agenda in Peking,” *The New Republic*, August 7& 14 (1971): 7.

<sup>23</sup> Dallek, *Nixon and Kissinger: Partners in Power*, (New York: Harper Collins, 2007), 616-617; Gaddis, *The Cold War: A New History*, 154-155; Gregory D. Cleva, *Henry Kissinger and the American Approach to Foreign Policy*, (Cranbury, NJ: Associated University Presses, 1989), 184-185.

### Solzhenitsyn, Helsinki, and the Sonnenfeldt Doctrine

After the Watergate scandal resulted in Nixon's resignation and Vice President Gerald Ford's ascendency to the White House, Secretary of State Kissinger would be personification of the major foreign policy decisions of the new administration, making him fodder for his journalistic critics who watched his every move. In 1975 when Kissinger offered strong advice that President Ford should refuse to meet with the prominent anti-Communist writer and Nobel Prize laureate Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, it became the center of a major controversy that a few writers held to be a major fallacy of Kissinger's thinking and diplomatic practice, one that they felt gave Moscow an edge in East/West relations.

Of particular consternation to conservatives were Secretary Kissinger's stern 1975 recommendations to President Gerald Ford that he not meet with Soviet author and dissident Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn prior to attending the Helsinki Conference. Solzhenitsyn was a virulent critic of what he perceived to be Moscow's disregard for human rights, as well as being an unwavering critic of *détente*; as such, to give him a high level meeting with Ford could possibly jeopardize the President's position in negotiating with the Soviets. His primary work, *Gulag Archipelago*, published in 1973 was a revealing look into the harsh environment in Soviet labour camps. As a dissident who frequently criticized Western accommodation with Moscow, and given his stature as a Nobel laureate, his opinion, it was surmised, would help to shape a much needed consensus as to why *détente* was a failure.<sup>24</sup> Thus, a few

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<sup>24</sup> See, "The Strangled Cry of Solzhenitsyn," *The National Review*, 29 August (1975): 929-934. Here, the editors of this journal (read Buckley) allowed a speech that Solzhenitsyn gave to the AFL-CIO to be published in full. In one critical passage of the speech, he says, 'The cold war---the war of hatred - is still going on, but only on the Communist side. What is the cold war? It's a war of abuse---and they still abuse you. They trade with you, they sign agreements and treaties, but they still abuse you, they still curse you. In sources which you can read, and even more in those which are unavailable to you, and which you don't hear of, in the depths of the Soviet Union, the cold war has never stopped. It hasn't stopped for a second.' 936.

print were outraged that Kissinger made such a recommendation and that Ford followed it because Solzhenitsyn was considered (along with the noted scientist Andre Sakharov) to be the voice of conscience and a symbol of the continual abuses of the Soviet Union's post-Stalin era.<sup>25</sup> However, in a column in the *National Review*, William Buckley allowed the entire Solzhenitsyn address to be published in full, quoting an article in the *London Times* in his 'Editor's Note': 'And it is he, and those who read or hear his witness, and who invite him to speak or applaud him when he does so, and who protest when the niceties of diplomacy prevent the President of the United States from offering his symbolic hospitality - it is these whom I at any rate today salute.' While never mentioning Kissinger by name, Buckley's back handed insult was poignantly clear.<sup>26</sup>

Nevertheless, the opinion writers of the *National Review* and *New Republic* were especially angry with both Secretary Kissinger and President Ford for signing the 1975 Helsinki Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe. This accord signaled tacit Western recognition of the Soviet territorial gains made during World War Two and their vast political and military influence over its Eastern European satellite states.<sup>27</sup> At this juncture, noted writers considered the U.S.A's recognition of post-World War Two borders dominated by Moscow to be utterly unacceptable.<sup>28</sup>

The ferocious uproar over Helsinki proved to be a major source of criticism over the Ford/Kissingerian approach to U.S. /Soviet relations. In Walter Isaacson's (1992) classic study of Kissinger. Here, he likened the negative reaction to the Helsinki Accords to the same anger over President Franklin Roosevelt's alleged capitulation

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<sup>25</sup> Coral Bell, *The Diplomacy of Détente: The Kissinger Era*, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1977), 213-214.

<sup>26</sup> Buckley, "The Strangled Cry of Solzhenitsyn," 929.

<sup>27</sup> Gaddis, *The Cold War: A New History*, 189-191; Leo P. Ribuffo, "Is Poland A Soviet Satellite? Gerald Ford, the Sonnenfeldt Doctrine, and the Election of 1976," *Diplomatic History*, 14 ,3, 1 June (2007): 385-404; Cleva, *Henry Kissinger and the American Approach to Foreign Policy*, 197.

<sup>28</sup> Griffith, "Party of One: Judging Kissinger," 23.

to Soviet Premier Joseph Stalin at the Yalta Conference some thirty years before.<sup>29</sup> But Harvey Starr's 1984 analysis of Helsinki was even more striking and mirrored much of the well-touted line. He wrote, "The possibility of political and military confrontation in Europe would be enhanced, and the situation become unstable and dangerous in Kissinger's conception of world order."<sup>30</sup>

It is important to note, that the writers of the *New Republic* and *National Review* waited until an opportune time to issue their critique of both détente and Helsinki as they were both considered linked to a larger schema of foreign policy naivety.

Consequently, the collective furor over Solzhenitsyn, the controversy over Helsinki, and disclosure of remarks about the sought-after "organic" relationship between the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe made by Helmut Sonnenfeldt, Kissinger's chief political aide in the State Department, placed both President Ford and Secretary Kissinger in the proverbial crosshairs as the 1976 elections approached.

In a December, 1975 'closed door meeting' with diplomats in London, Sonnenfeldt said that the United States must come to grips with the fact that the Soviet Union was indeed a permanent fixture in Eastern Europe and that it was the Ford Administration's intention to put an end to what he considered the 'inorganic, unnatural relationship between Moscow and its satellite states.'<sup>31</sup>

The details of Sonnenfeldt's remarks were made public in the American press in April, 1976 just as the contentious Republican primary race between President Ford and California Governor Ronald Reagan, a fervent critic of *détente*, had reached a critical

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<sup>29</sup> Walter Isaacson, *Kissinger: A Biography*, (New York: Touchstone, 1992), 661.

<sup>30</sup> Harvey Starr, *Kissinger*, (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 1984), 72.

<sup>31</sup> Gaddis, *The Cold War: A New History* 189; Sonnenfeldt was more specific when he says, 'So it must be our policy to strive for an evolution that makes the relationship between the Eastern Europeans and the Soviet Union,' quoted in Isaacson, *Kissinger: A Biography*, 664.



phase. Reagan was perhaps the sharpest critic of Sonnenfeldt's remarks, noting that it was emblematic of the Ford Administration's propensity to capitulate to Soviet demands, that the marginalization of Solzhenitsyn and Helsinki made Sonnenfeldt's remarks even more poignant. The implication being, according to Reagan, that 'slaves should accept their fate.'<sup>32</sup>

True to form, the writers from *The National Review* and *The New Republic* were all too enthusiastic to establish the critical link between Helsinki and Ford and Kissinger's seeming inability to 'train the bear.' In the former journal, James Burnham wrote a most articulate and logically progressive criticism of Helsinki and the Sonnenfeldt Doctrine by intimating that the policies were constructed along a faulty and flimsy logic that presupposed that stability in East/West relations could only ensue once the U.S.A. acceded to Soviet demands unilaterally. In a twist of supreme sarcasm, He posits:

Two primary strategies will further this policy: We should expand mutual trade relations, granting the Soviet Union most favored-nation status and adequate credits, and facilitating large scale Soviet entry into our domestic market. We should help shift the relationship between the Soviet Union and the East European nations from its present unnatural basis in crude force to a natural, organic basis. The transformed relationship will incorporate both the Soviet primacy deriving from geopolitical reality and the national identities of the East European countries. So transformed, the Soviet superpower will no longer be subject to the tensions that threaten to set off world war and will be able to focus on the improvement of its domestic economy in harmony with the global economy. Thus: Peace and prosperity.<sup>33</sup>

By critically assessing the Sonnenfeldt Doctrine in light of the presupposed appeasement at Helsinki, Burnham provided one of the key insights to how they perceived that Ford and Kissinger had bungled U.S. foreign policy objectives. Here, the implication was

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<sup>32</sup> Gaddis, *The Cold War: A New History*,189.

<sup>33</sup> James Burnham, "The Kissinger-Sonnenfeldt Doctrine: I," *The National Review*, 14 May (1976): 495.

clear. While President Ford defeated Governor Reagan (barely) to achieve the Republican presidential nomination, the issue of Helsinki and the Sonnenfeldt Doctrine continued to haunt him throughout his campaign against the Democratic nominee, former Georgia governor Jimmy Carter. *The New Republic's* John Osborne readily pounced on President Ford's gaffe during a presidential debate in San Francisco that there was 'no Soviet domination of Eastern Europe.' Osborne also suggested that Kissinger stayed in Washington so as not to give the perception that he was the true brains behind Ford's foreign policy. Just the same, Osborne made the connection as he seemed to gloat over the President's fatal slip of the tongue. He writes:

The President has been drenched for two years in the subtleties of Henry Kissinger's view that the US had to recognize the Soviet presence in Eastern Europe as a fact without either condoning it or condemning it. He got a renewed dose of it from Kissinger and [National Security Council Advisor Lieutenant General Brent] Scowcroft in San Francisco. He was urged to defend the controversial 1975 Helsinki Agreement---attacked by Carter and Ronald Reagan among others, as craven recognition by the US by Soviet mastery---on the ground that it actually forbade further Soviet military aggression in Europe.<sup>34</sup>

In Osborne's calculus, the political damage was done: Ford would be easily defeated in November because the American voter could readily draw the nexus between a bumbling candidate, a sinister and manipulative subordinate, and a failed foreign policy. Perhaps, this connection, Osborne concludes, was the greatest single monument to the failures of *détente*.

## Analysis

Collectively, the musings of Kissinger's critics in both the *New Republic* and the *National Review* make the key and critical linkage to

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<sup>34</sup> John Osborne, "Ford's Boo Boos," *The New Republic*, October 23, 1976, 9.

his diplomatic style, penchant for secrecy, neo-Metternichian pretensions, and personal opportunism. Moreover, many of those writers accused him of having undue influence over the crafting of U.S. foreign policy objectives in a way that placed national security objectives in great jeopardy. The policy of *détente*, it was suggested, was the blanket reversal of nearly twenty plus years of bipartisan consensus to contain Soviet ‘aggression’ and to maintain close ties with Taipei, thus holding ‘Red China’ at bay.

These opinion makers strongly argued that the Soviet Union’s presence in Eastern Europe was problematic as millions of citizens were held as ‘slaves’ (to borrow from Ronald Reagan), and that Helsinki and the Sonnenfeldt Doctrine was a cruel and maniacal policy that continued that ‘enslavement.’ Moreover, the snubbing of Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn was indeed part of a cynical scheme to marginalize a significant anti-Soviet voice in the name of political expediency and that this was a betrayal of core Western democratic values.

Hence, the core of much of the criticism of *détente* and the rapprochement to China in those two journals pointed to a wholesale character flaw in Henry Kissinger. However, there were a number of factors that many of those writers failed to consider in their critique that greatly weakened their overall policy-based arguments. For example, these writers consistently maintained that Kissinger’s *détente* policy signaled a willingness for the United States to capitulate to Soviet demands in the overall strategic global order, e.g. arms control, trade, and human rights. Likewise, their approach to U.S.A.-Soviet relations was weak and unilateral, making Washington vulnerable to blackmail; that *détente* was ‘a one way street.’<sup>35</sup> This strategy, the writers observed, would embolden Moscow to act precipitously against American interests in Western Europe and elsewhere. In those articles, especially those penned by James Chace, Richard Whalen, and James Burnham, Kissinger was the dangerous culprit whose propensity towards diplomatic

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<sup>35</sup> Yergin, “In Faint Praise of Détente,” 18.

concealment, disdain for bureaucracy (and his perceived arrogant demeanor) endangered U.S. credibility. Undeniably, those writers yearned for a return to the type of hard-nose diplomacy that was practiced by Kissinger's predecessors: Marshall, Acheson, Dulles, and Rusk.

As for the claim that Kissinger's reliance on secrecy was evident of his flawed character, the writers (especially Whalen) failed to comprehend the historical fact that a critical ingredient of diplomacy is the occasional need for pragmatic discretion. Kissinger's perceptive knowledge of the need for infrequent secrecy in diplomatic matters allowed the Nixon and Ford Administrations to enact their policies more effectively, thus pragmatically maintaining the element of surprise and keeping the goal of extracting greater concessions from Moscow at the negotiating table would be the desired result. Time and again the *National Review* and *New Republic's* columnists (especially Whalen) completely oversimplified the changing dynamics of the Cold War during the early 1970s. To be sure, the Soviet Union had reached strategic nuclear parity with the United States by the late 1960s but the likelihood of those weapons being used in anger was far less than it was a decade prior, i.e. the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis. Thus, Washington and Moscow understood that the outbreak of a major war in Europe (over Berlin especially) or over a larger global conflict would be an act of mutual suicide.

Hence, Washington and Moscow began to defuse such a possibility with the 1963 Nuclear Test Ban Treaty, the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty of 1968, and by engaging in serious arms control talks in the atmosphere of Glassboro. As a group, those inquisitive wordsmiths failed to comprehend the fact that brinkmanship, both as a policy and an overall approach to East/West relations, was no longer a viable option; that on both sides the risks for thermonuclear conflagration were too terrible to contemplate.

Columnists like Buckley, Baarslag, and the editorial board of *The New Republic* strongly condemned the secrecy of Kissinger's visit to Beijing in June signaled the possible restoration of normalized relations between the United States and 'Red China.' To be sure, Kissinger was accused of misreading the essence of the Sino-Soviet split and acting in a haphazard manner that could jeopardize the security of Taiwan, and provide Beijing a pretext to make unreasonable demands on Washington in the areas of diplomacy and trade.

In their collective calculus, Henry Kissinger was cavorting with the personification of evil, Mao Tse-tung. In this regard, the columnists argued, Kissinger's actions were both disingenuous to a trusted ally and frightfully naïve.

Of all of the written criticisms of Kissinger's visit to China, Baarslag's article seemed the most cynical in its approach. It begged the question of where (and how) he received information from China's wire services and radio transmissions mocking Kissinger and Nixon, when China was in the middle of the Cultural Revolution, where anti-Western propaganda was frequently touted. Granted, he cited various quotes from statements allegedly made by Chinese officials in the "Peking Service in English" from early July, 1971 as his primary source, he failed to interpret those comments within proper thematic context.

In addition, the writers maintained that the greatest failing of Kissingerian *détente* was highlighted by the marginalization of a prophetic anti-Soviet voice (Solzhenitsyn) and the virtual surrender of Eastern Europe to its Russian 'slave masters': their bitter reaction to the Sonnenfeldt doctrine.

As a consequence, columnists James Burnham and John Osborne failed to take into consideration that a public meeting between Ford and Solzhenitsyn would have sent the proverbial wrong message to Moscow that Washington would take a harder line in East/West diplomacy, thus endangering the talks in Helsinki, talks involving a possible second SALT treaty, and the overall tone of U.S.A.- Soviet

relations. Meanwhile, the Sonnenfeldt doctrine, while politically disastrous to President Ford's primary and general election bids, was only the recognition of what had been apparent since 1945: that the Soviet Union had a strong presence in Eastern Europe and simply wishing it away through continued non-recognition would not put an end to the occupation, their expressed and tacit angst notwithstanding.

While well intentioned, the writers of *The National Review* and *The New Republic* tended to oversimplify and overstate their persistent criticisms of the *détente* policy. But what's more, their negative and personal assessment of Henry Kissinger was at once demonizing and spiteful.

## **CONCLUSION**

While this article discussed the most serious criticisms of Kissinger in two influential journals, this subject is far from exhaustive. In fact, this is the beginning of a major research project of similar ideological critiques of *détente* (and the intellectual godfather who promoted it) in daily newspapers, popular magazines, and public speeches. The amount material on this topic is tremendous and it will be the task of diplomatic and journalistic historians to uncover this data and view it through the lens of practical analysis.

In this respect can the historical record regarding the Kissingerian record be made clear and lucid, not to mention the journalists and writers who covered it. However, the scholar of both diplomatic history and printed media must be careful not to fall into the trap of revisionism or the follies of contemporary political discourse. Instead, the historian must employ a pragmatic research hermeneutic that realistically assesses the claims made by commentators against the larger standard of international political reality.

### **About the Author**

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