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KISSINGER, *THE WHITE HOUSE YEARS* (1980)

In a study of Kissinger's foreign policy written before his memoirs appeared, Seyom Brown describes Kissinger as "the arch practitioner of the razzle-dazzle, 'can do' American pragmatism," his performance "a brilliantly executed series of improvisations," perhaps "more shuttle than substance."[1] The fifteen-hundred-page memoirs, covering Nixon's first term, confirm that assessment. Many pages are devoted to what Kissinger calls "philosophy" ("The statesman's responsibility is to struggle against transitoriness and not to insist that he be paid in the coin of eternity," "to strive, to create, and to resist the decay that besets all human institutions") and to the lessons of history ("There can be no peace without equilibrium and no justice without restraint"; 55). The discussion throughout is as vapid as these examples suggest. Our goal is "peace and justice" (70), "a global equilibrium" (192), "to find a trajectory toward a world where no one had ever been" (809). The statesman must struggle "to rescue some permanence from the tenuousness of human foresight" (747). The text is sprinkled with such words as "paradoxical" and "ironic." It would be a mistake to think that behind this lies some subtle "conceptual framework" or global design. Rather, Kissinger's memoirs give the impression

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Review of Henry Kissinger, *The White House Years* (Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1979).

of a middle-level manager who has learned to conceal vacuity with pretentious verbiage.

"Equilibrium was the name of the game," Kissinger explains (764). But what is "equilibrium"? "Equilibrium" is secured by thwarting "Moscow's geopolitical ambitions" (764); "we would not ignore, as our predecessors had done, the role of the Soviet Union in making the war in Vietnam possible" by "massive supplies to North Vietnam" (133, 121)—a reasonable stance, on the assumption that the United States owns the world. Still another threat to "equilibrium" was "Soviet aggressiveness in the Middle East" (801), as when antiaircraft systems and military personnel were sent to Egypt after Israeli bombing deep inside Egypt using U.S.-supplied Phantom jets. Other illustrations include "proxy wars by India and Syria" (1255), Hanoi's refusal to make peace on Kissinger's terms, Allende's electoral victory in Chile, all "facets of a global Communist challenge" (594). In the face of this global Soviet challenge, Washington must "strengthen security in an international system less dependent for stability on permanent American intervention" (765). The United States must continue to be "the bulwark of free peoples everywhere" (1014)—as in Guatemala, the Philippines, Chile, Iran, Indochina, the Dominican Republic, etc.

From many such passages, the meaning of "equilibrium" (or "stability") emerges clearly: It increases or declines as U.S. dominance of the global system increases or declines. Any decline is part of a global challenge orchestrated by Moscow (or earlier, Peking; in 1969, Kissinger "still considered the People's Republic of China the more aggressive of the Communist powers"; 173). The problem we face is that the USSR is intent on "waging a permanent war for men's minds," "mocking the traditional standard of international law that condemns interference in a country's domestic affairs" by sponsoring "upheavals, revolutions, subversion" with no concern for "Western concepts of goodwill." They understand only "self-interest," so that there is no point in "appeals to a sense of moral community" (117–25). They are so different from us, in these respects.

The world, unfortunately, sometimes fails to understand. Thus as "American self-doubt" became "contagious" in the 1960s, "European intellectuals began to argue that the Cold War was caused by American as well as by Soviet policies" (57), while "a vocal and at times violent minority" in the United States challenged "the hitherto almost unanimous conviction that the Cold War had been caused by Soviet intransigence" alone (65). Critics sometimes even "alleged that our [weapons] programs triggered Soviet responses rather than the other way around" (199). We should learn, however, from the Cuban missile crisis, where Kennedy

established "a psychological balance" so that some progress was possible (126); elsewhere, Kissinger notes that "Khrushchev's humiliation in Cuba was one cause of his overthrow two years later" and that "the Soviet Union, reacting in part to its humiliation in the Cuban missile crisis of 1962, had undertaken a massive effort to augment its military strength across the board" (196–97). "Psychological balance" equals "humiliation of the Soviet Union." Only the most deluded could believe that U.S. initiatives contribute to international tension.

Our "malaise" is so deep that it requires not "expertise" but "philosophy," particularly because of the "ominous change" in the nature of power. "The capacity to destroy proved difficult to translate into a plausible threat even against countries with no capacity for retaliation"; power has "turned abstract, intangible, elusive" (66–67), as the peasants of Indochina can testify.

One should not try to assess such pronouncements, which abound, as if they represented some effort at analysis of contemporary history. Kissinger's conception of the U.S. role in the world is encapsulated in his criticism of pre-Kissinger policy as "oscillat[ing] . . . between optimistic exuberance and frustration with the ambiguities of an imperfect world" (57); the invariant commitment of the United States, by definition, is to overcome these imperfections. These are simply the effusions of someone with no understanding of history and no interest in it. As in his academic writings, Kissinger reveals himself to be an unquestioning advocate of the use of American power to establish global dominance, a person who can be assigned the management of this power by others who are concerned with the real motives for its exercise, a question that is outside Kissinger's purview.[2]

Kissinger claims that prior to his involvement in policy formation, there was no geopolitical tradition in the United States, where "by 'geopolitical' I mean an approach that pays attention to the requirements of equilibrium" (914). This geopolitical concern for equilibrium, as history shows, usually suggests "siding with the weaker to deter the stronger" (915)—which does not imply that the USSR should side with Vietnam or Cuba to deter the United States. It is, of course, sheer nonsense to claim that Kissinger introduced the concept of "geopolitics" to American foreign policy.[3] Others, who are concerned with fact, understand the concept in more rational terms. For example, *Business Week* (January 28, 1980) called for a "revival of geopolitics," noting that thirty years ago "Washington planned protection of vital raw materials through intensive intelligence and military contingency operations," just as an earlier (and realistic) analysis (April 7, 1975) explained how "fueled initially by the dollars of the Marshall Plan, American business prospered and

expanded on overseas orders. . . . No matter how negative a development, there was always the umbrella of American power to contain it. . . . The rise of the multinational corporation was the economic expression of this political framework," though "this stable world order for business operations is falling apart" in the mid-1970s. But there are no such lapses in Kissinger's orations. The Marshall Plan, for example, merely "expressed our idealism" (61), just as "American moral leadership" did throughout the postwar period (380).

Kissinger admires Bismarck's maxim that "courage and success do not stand in a causal relationship; they are identical" (905). Courage, as he has explained in his academic writings and illustrates throughout these memoirs, and more significantly in his actions, is the willingness to smash opponents incapable of retaliation and to "face up to the risks of Armageddon,"[4] for example, in "go[ing] to the brink over Pakistan" (1293). He explains how "we might inculcate habits of moderation" in the Soviet leadership (1204); this, immediately following his prideful account of the bombing of Hanoi and Haiphong, the mining of Haiphong harbor, and the use of B-52s in the South ("bombing and mining had greatly improved Hanoi's manners" [1303], demonstrating that "only the fear of resumed military operations would keep Hanoi on course"; 1431). The bombing of Hanoi and Haiphong was initiated in the full expectation that the Russians would cancel the planned summit, a fact that does not deter Kissinger from castigating the media for their similar assessment (1200, 1191). It is not difficult to manifest "courage" of this sort when the enemy is too weak to strike back and one trusts that others with real power will not be insane enough to respond with similar "courage."

While Kissinger has nothing rational to say about the goals or framework of policy, he treats the reader to extensive detail on such world-shaking topics as the theory of negotiations, the styles of various political leaders, their ranking on the humor quotient, and so on. Throughout, he describes his masterful handling of negotiations and his victories in single-handed combat over his tormentors, from "Ducky" (Le Duc Tho) to university presidents and academic colleagues, who repeatedly reveal their silliness in his rendition of their interventions. The reader's awe at Kissinger's brilliance is perhaps tempered slightly by his account of a Russian report of Brezhnev's comparable achievements, which recalls "Dean Acheson's famous dictum that no one ever lost a debate in a memorandum of conversation dictated by oneself" (1208).

Only in conversation with "the Colossus of de Gaulle" does Kissinger falter, and in an interesting manner. Kissinger attempts to explain to de Gaulle that the United States must continue to pound Indochina because "a sudden withdrawal might give us a credibility problem."

"Where?" de Gaulle asks. "The Middle East," Kissinger suggests. " 'How very odd,' said the General from a foot above me. 'It is precisely in the Middle East that I thought your enemies had the credibility problem' " (110). One wonders whether de Gaulle left it at that, or proceeded further to demolish Kissinger's rationale for destroying Indochina. In any event, Kissinger records no response, and in fact nowhere explains how American "credibility" was secured by his murderous conduct of the war.

Kissinger has been accused of treating the war in Cambodia, obviously enflamed by his initiatives despite pathetic attempts at self-justification, as a "sideshow."[5] His memoirs reveal that the characterization is correct: The war was extended to Cambodia to help achieve U.S. aims in South Vietnam; "Cambodia was *not* a moral issue" (his emphasis; 515). But the criticism is too limited. Vietnam too was a "sideshow." For Kissinger, the war was fought to establish "credibility," and for his predecessors, "to show that the 'war of liberation' . . . is costly, dangerous and doomed to failure" (General Maxwell Taylor, February 1966)[6] and to prevent a "domino effect," namely, the danger that social and economic successes in Indochina might cause "the rot to spread" throughout the U.S.-dominated system.[7]

Kissinger, however, deals with none of these topics, limiting himself to standard patriotic speeches: "Our predecessors had entered in innocence, convinced that the cruel civil war represented the cutting edge of some global design"; "our entry into the war had been the product . . . of a naive idealism that wanted to set right all the world's ills and believed American goodwill supplied its own efficacy" (226, 230). In fact, in the 1940s analysts clearly understood that in aiding France they were combating the nationalist movement of Vietnam, and despite later pretense, the clearer-headed (e.g., field operations coordinator of the U.S. Operations Mission John Paul Vann) always understood that this was true in South Vietnam,[8] at least until U.S. might had succeeded in demolishing the society. Idealism and good will played as much of a role as they did when Russia invaded Hungary or Afghanistan. Kissinger's account, which would embarrass a moderately well-informed high school student, cannot even maintain consistency. Thus we read that the Vietnamese have "little sense of nationhood" though "they have fought for centuries . . . to determine their national destiny" (231, 274).

What is perhaps more interesting is Kissinger's complete failure to comprehend the dynamics of the Cold War. He says (and probably believes) that "we became involved because we considered the warfare in Indochina the manifestation of a coordinated global Communist strategy" (64). He also reports, correctly this time, that when the USSR invaded Czechoslovakia, "they did so amid a smokescreen of accusations against

the United States, West Germany, and NATO for 'interfering' " (116). Much the same is true when the USSR now invades Afghanistan, just as the United States was defending freedom from a global Communist conspiracy when it overthrew the government of Guatemala or invaded the Dominican Republic. But the real function of the Cold War is far beyond Kissinger's comprehension or concern.[9]

In his efforts to achieve "equilibrium," Kissinger was beset by enemies on every hand: not only Russia and its various "proxies," but also the bureaucracy, Congress, the media, his academic colleagues, arms-control specialists, the young (who, contrary to appearances, were not really protesting the war, but were "stimulated by a sense of guilt encouraged by modern psychiatry and the radical chic rhetoric of upper middle-class suburbia," overcome with "the metaphysical despair of those who saw before them a life of affluence in a spiritual desert"; 297, 299), the American public, and finally, the world. During the 1972 Christmas bombings, a noble effort to achieve peace, "Not one NATO ally supported us or even hinted at understanding our point of view" (1453); "world opinion had been oblivious to Hanoi's transgressions" and believed Hanoi "to be the victim of American 'oppression' when it had started every war in Indochina since 1954" (1425). Fifteen hundred pages do not suffice to provide evidence for this repeated and essential claim. Again, it would be pointless, in this context, to enter into a detailed discussion of the actual facts—say, the U.S. subversion of the 1954 Geneva Accords (Kissinger is outraged over Hanoi's "flagrant violation of the Geneva Accords" eighteen years later; 1115), the massive U.S.-backed assault against the anti-French resistance in the late 1950s, the U.S. bombing of the South in the early 1960s, the full-scale invasion of the South before there was evidence of the presence of any regular North Vietnamese forces, the successful overthrow of the government of Laos in 1958 after a Pathet Lao electoral victory, etc., etc. Facts are plainly irrelevant to this style of discourse, and Kissinger never asks why the world was so oblivious of his version of them: why the world believed that our "war to resist aggression had turned into a symbol of fundamental American evil" (56), unaccountably.

The most terrible enemies were the Vietnamese—North and South. The "diplomatic style" of Hanoi was "maddening," with its "almost morbid suspicion and ferocious self-righteousness . . . compounded by a legacy of Cartesian logic," contrasting with the American style, based on "the American belief in the efficacy of goodwill and the importance of compromise" and "an ethic of tolerance" (259). Our client Thieu and his associates were "egregious," "despicable," "outrageous" (1326, 1358), generating in Kissinger "that impotent rage by which the Vietnamese have always tormented physically stronger opponents" (1327). Their methods

were "obnoxiously Vietnamese," specifically, Thieu's "egregious, almost maniacal, tactics and his total insensitivity to our necessities" (1467). Thieu applied "to us the elusive tactics Vietnamese reserve for foreigners" in an effort "to grind us down" (1322), just as Hanoi "sought to grind us down" (1329). In the real world context, remote from Kissinger's story, it was the Americans who were "grinding the enemy down by sheer weight and mass" (pacification chief Robert Komer[10]); Kissinger, of course, saw none of this—from his visits to Vietnam he recalls only "idealistic Americans working under impossible conditions to bring government and health and development to a terrified and bewildered people" (230). Americans, in their naiveté and idealism, were "ever unequal to the complexities of Vietnamese psychology" (1375). "Whether in making war or peace, Vietnam seemed destined to break American hearts" (1445). Even the Vietnamese language, "with its finely shaded meanings quite beyond our grasp," was an enemy (1325). By the end, Kissinger is virtually frothing at the mouth over the "arrogance" and "insolence" (his favorite word) of Vietnamese on all sides. The basic colonialist, indeed racist attitudes can no longer be concealed, as his frenzy mounts.

A man of deep sensitivity, Kissinger is appalled by the lack of compassion revealed by his domestic enemies (who were numerous: "all the press, the media and intellectuals have a vested interest in our defeat"; 1390)—though there were occasions on which some of the press were "compassionate" (293, 1011). The doves, he writes, "have proved to be a specially vicious kind of bird"; there was "no civility or grace from the antiwar leaders" (295). The "most poignant fate" was visited on Robert McNamara, demoted to head of the World Bank (295). Walt Rostow was "mercilessly persecuted," "not reappointed to his professorship at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology" (295) (he received a full professorship at the University of Texas). The example is typical of Kissinger's difficulties with the real world. True, Rostow was not reappointed—by a political science department no less hawkish than he. In fact, a group of antiwar students and faculty did initiate an inquiry to determine whether an issue of academic freedom arose, announcing their intention to protest if this were the case, on the grounds that war criminals should not be denied appointment on political grounds.[11] But it quickly became obvious that Rostow's wartime record could hardly have been a factor in his rejection by his colleagues, who were not quite "antiwar leaders." Not even the most trivial example escapes Kissinger's mania for falsification.

Others too deserve "compassion," specifically, the Shah, "a pillar of stability in a turbulent and vital region." He was a "dedicated reformer" who was "undermined by his successes" while "wrestling perhaps with forces beyond any man's control" (as contrasted, say, with the leadership

in Indochina after the great peacemaker had completed his work). The Shah "understood that the dangers to Iranian independence had historically come from the north," not from England and the United States. "He had been restored to the throne in 1953 by American influence [sic] when a leftist government had come close to toppling him" (the Mossadegh government was "leftist," by definition, by virtue of the decline in "equilibrium" caused by its moves towards independence). He then pursued his "noble aspirations," though, to be sure, some of the methods were "unworthy of the enlightened goals." If the Shah was "authoritarian," this was "in keeping with the traditions, perhaps even the necessities, of his society." The "most implacable opposition" to him, as we see from the events of 1978, was narrowly based: landowners, mullahs, and "radicals." "Nor can it be said that the Shah's arms purchases diverted resources from economic development"; the United States simply tried "to match the influx of Soviet arms into neighboring countries" (1258f.).

As always, Kissinger wisely refrains from offering any evidence for his pronouncements, which, in this case, pass beyond his usual ignorance or deception. The factual record shows that the Shah's enlightened policies were a disaster for a large part of the rural population and the urban poor, and that vast resources were squandered with the help of the huge Nixon-Kissinger program of recycling petrodollars by pouring arms into the hands of the "guardian of the Gulf," with consequences that are well known.[12] There is barely a phrase in Kissinger's account that rises above absurdity.

Kissinger describes how he visited Teheran after leaving Moscow, comparing the grim atmosphere there with Teheran, where he "felt almost a physical sense of relief" because "the warm goodwill was tangible" and the visit "humanly engaging," not dampened by the misery of poor peasants driven to urban slums or by "a history of torture which is beyond belief" in a country with perhaps the worst human rights record in the world, according to Amnesty International at about the same time. His conclusion is that we should now show compassion—to the Shah, not his victims. "The least we owe him is not retrospectively to vilify the actions that eight American Presidents—including the present incumbent—gratefully welcomed," such as murder, torture, and vast robbery and corruption. We will "impress no one by condemning him now"—at least no one who counts, excluding, for example, Iranians or others in the Third World. As for the possibility of examining our own record in applying "influence" to place this tyrant on his throne, establishing and training his dreaded secret police, providing the means for massive repression to the very end of his bloody rule, creating an economy that

squandered vast wealth while perpetuating, sometimes intensifying, misery and impoverishment—that question, needless to say, does not arise.

It also goes without saying that no compassion is recommended for the beneficiaries of Kissinger's efforts to maintain "equilibrium" and "credibility" in Indochina, Chile, Bangladesh, or elsewhere.

Kissinger's noble endeavors to achieve peace and justice are framed by the Indochina war. The first challenge he faced was the "unprovoked offensive" launched by Hanoi in February 1969 with "extraordinary cynicism," violating the "understanding" reached the previous November when the United States ceased the bombing of the North (but not the South, or Laos, where the bombing was in fact intensified). Hanoi did not stop to test the "professions of intent" of the new Administration, but moved at once "to step up the killing of Americans" (239–42). The story ends when Kissinger finally compelled Hanoi by massive force to accept peace on his terms, after which he would have left office, had his great achievement not been undermined by Watergate and renewed North Vietnamese aggression. It was the "unprovoked offensive" of February that justified the "secret bombing" of Cambodia from March 1969, "after prayerful consideration" (253); then, as at the time of the April 1970 invasion, "The precipitating issue was the Communist sanctuaries from which the North Vietnamese had tormented our forces" (459), who, obviously, had every right to be in South Vietnam to "defend" the population, as they had been doing since U.S. forces began to engage in bombing of villages, defoliation, and forced population removal in the early 1960s.

A look at the facts reveals, as usual, a rather different story. Let us begin with the events of 1968–69. According to the Kissinger version, after the November bombing halt (redistribution, to be more exact), General Abrams undertook new tactics: He "concentrated on protecting the population" (236). Turning to the real world, Averell Harriman, who was U.S. negotiator in Paris, testified before Congress that in October–November 1968, Hanoi's withdrawal of 90 percent of its forces from the northern two provinces (Kissinger asks in early 1969: "Why did NVA [North Vietnamese army] units leave South Vietnam last summer and fall?"; 238) permitted General Abrams to move forces to the region near Saigon "to strengthen our position there."[13] The American command shifted to Abrams's new concept of "total war," with more aggressive tactics aimed at the VC "infrastructure" and main forces. By February, the rate of American-initiated contacts had increased 100 percent, U.S. military officers reported with much gratification, thereby confirming Harriman's opinion that the February offensive was a response to U.S. actions. "Allied officials concede that the current enemy offensive may

in part be a reaction to this added pressure," along with the "accelerated pacification campaign."[14]

What of the "accelerated pacification campaign"? After the "bombing halt," the U.S. command launched several of the fiercest campaigns of the war against the population of the South, for example, the six-month-long Operation SPEEDY EXPRESS in the Mekong Delta province of Kien Hoa (December 1, 1968), where there appear to have been no North Vietnamese troops, and where the "infrastructure" of the indigenous NLF, which largely controlled the province, was decimated at a cost of thousands of civilian casualties by "a relentless night and day barrage of rockets, shells, bombs and bullets from planes, artillery and helicopters," along with B-52 attacks (some targeted directly on villages), defoliation, and ground sweeps that rounded up the population and sent them to prison camps (Kevin Buckley, head of the Saigon bureau of *Newsweek*).[15] Or Operation BOLD MARINER, launched in January 1969, which drove some twelve thousand peasants (including, apparently, the remnants of the My Lai massacre) from the caves and bunkers in which they had endeavored to survive constant U.S. bombardment, after which the land was leveled with artillery barrages and Rome Plows to ensure that nothing would grow in an area where the dikes had long been destroyed by U.S. bombing. Reporting from the Mekong Delta—far from the "unprovoked offensive"—Peter Arnett reported that the "conflagration . . . is tearing the social fabric apart"; in "free-fire zones, the Americans could bring to bear at any time the enormous firepower available from helicopter gunships, bombers and artillery . . . fighter-bombers and artillery pound the enemy positions into the gray porridge that the green delta land becomes when pulverized by high explosives."[16] There were massive casualties, including the civilians who were being "protected" by the new tactics. Not a word about any of this appears in Kissinger's account of the "unprovoked offensive" launched with such "extraordinary cynicism" by Hanoi, justifying the "secret bombing" of Cambodia.

Kissinger's selective account is natural, on the assumption that the South Vietnamese were fair game. The assumption appears to be common to Kissinger and many of his critics. For example, in a critical review of Kissinger's memoirs in the *New York Times* (November 11, 1979), Barbara Tuchman dismisses his anger over the "unprovoked offensive" on the following grounds: "Is an offensive supposed to be bloodless? Is there something peculiarly shocking about killing enemy soldiers in war?" Kissinger "seems inappropriately indignant," she feels, saying nothing about the savage intensified U.S. attacks in the South (regularly, against South Vietnamese civilians) that preceded the "unprovoked offensive."

What about the sanctuaries along the border from which the "North

Vietnamese" were "tormenting our forces"? Sihanouk once referred to "the cynicism of the United States executive" in describing "our resistance" as " 'foreign intervention' on our own soil." "Where then should our liberation armies go?" he asked. "To the United States?" "Have the United States aggressors, through some operation of the Holy Ghost, become pure-blooded Indochinese?"[17] The U.S. forces, of course, had sanctuaries extending from Guam to Thailand from which they battered all of Indochina. In fact, forces trained and organized by the United States had been attacking Cambodia from sanctuaries in South Vietnam and Thailand from the late 1950s (not to speak of an abortive CIA-backed coup in Phnom Penh in 1958), and increasingly from 1964, causing many civilian casualties. U.S. military personnel and aircraft were often directly involved. The enormous U.S. military operations in South Vietnam in early 1967, aimed primarily at driving out the population, no doubt also drove many into Cambodia, where they became "North Vietnamese," the technical term for Vietnamese who did not follow American orders. It is interesting that as late as May 1967, after these operations, the Pentagon expressed concern that Cambodia was "becoming more and more important as a supply base—now of food and medicines, perhaps ammunition later."[18] The North Vietnamese forces in the South were drawn into the war—exactly as U.S. planners had anticipated—when the United States attacked the North in August 1964 and systematically from February 1965, simultaneously initiating far heavier systematic bombing of the South and a full-scale invasion. But according to Kissinger, North Vietnam had ruthlessly invaded Cambodia in setting up "sanctuaries" along the borders, and many of his critics agree; Tuchman, for example, states that "the North Vietnamese were unquestionably the first to violate the neutrality of Cambodia—as the Germans were of Belgium in 1914."

If one accepts Kissinger's unargued premises about the right of the United States to attack South Vietnam and to organize its clients to attack Cambodia, as many of his critics evidently do, then one might conceivably make a case for the "secret bombings" of sanctuaries from which American forces were being "tormented." It is the premises, however, that are cynical beyond description.

I have placed the phrase "secret bombings" in quotes for a reason. Kissinger asserts repeatedly that Cambodia never "claimed that there were Cambodian or civilian casualties" (249), that the border regions attacked were "unpopulated" (247), and that Sihanouk never objected to American bombing of Cambodia (250, and elsewhere). In fact, on March 26, a week after the "secret bombings" began, the Cambodian government condemned the bombing and strafing of "the Cambodian population living in the border regions . . . almost daily by U.S. aircraft," with increas-

ing numbers of people killed and material destroyed, alleging that these attacks were directed against "peaceful Cambodian farmers" and demanding that "these criminal attacks must immediately and definitively stop." At a March 28 press conference, Sihanouk emphatically denied reports that he "would not oppose U.S. bombings of communist targets within my frontiers," adding that "unarmed and innocent people have been victims of U.S. bombs," including "the latest bombing, the victims of which were Khmer peasants, women and children in particular." He appealed to the press "to publicize abroad this very clear stand of Cambodia—that is, I will in any case oppose all bombings on Cambodian territory under whatever pretext." The appeal was in vain. The bombings were "secret" in the sense that the media kept them secret; Sihanouk's statements have yet to appear in mainstream books or journals in the United States.[19]

On January 3, 1970, Sihanouk's government—recognized by the United States—issued an official White Paper giving specific details of U.S. and U.S.-client attacks on Cambodia up to May 1969, including 5,149 air attacks, with dates, places, casualties, photographs, etc. There was no mention in the U.S. press, to my knowledge, though the facts were readily available.[20] The belief that these areas were virtually "unpopulated," always untenable, was exploded by the reports of U.S. correspondents who entered Cambodia with the attacking U.S.-GVN forces in April.[21] U.S. correspondent T. D. Allman reported in the *Far Eastern Economic Review* in February 1970 that in a border area that Nixon and Kissinger describe as one of the most dangerous sanctuaries, he could find no Vietnamese, though "United States aircraft violate Cambodian air space and bomb and strafe Cambodian territory" regularly, causing many casualties.[22] There are many similar eyewitness reports, all studiously ignored in this "history," and also by many of Kissinger's critics.

These "oversights" are typical. Writing of Laos, also allegedly subverted and ruthlessly invaded by Hanoi with no provocation, Kissinger observes that "early in 1970 Laos briefly became the focal point of our Indochina concerns" because "a North Vietnamese offensive was threatening to overrun northern Laos" (451). He reviews the "history," which he says "is of some importance." A few things are missing, however, from the successful American effort to undermine a political settlement in the 1950s to the massive U.S. bombing in the late 1960s directed against the civilian population of northern Laos and intensified under Kissinger—in yet another falsehood, he states that U.S. actions were accurately reported by the media, which in fact suppressed eyewitness reports of the bombing by Jacques Decornoy of *Le Monde*. Kissinger also forgets to mention that the "North Vietnamese offensive" restored the territorial division that

had existed from 1964 to August 1969, when the CIA mercenary army swept through the area after the terror bombing of the civilian society that also escapes notice.

Kissinger's further claim that "the number of North Vietnamese troops stationed in Laos had risen to 67,000" by 1970 (450) repeats a claim in a Nixon speech of March 6, 1970, that was a joke among the press corps in Vientiane (where I happened to be at the time). The standard U.S. estimate for some time had been fifty thousand troops; Nixon's revised estimate was an attempt to substantiate charges about a "North Vietnamese invasion." But he had neglected to inform U.S. intelligence of this new influx of troops, so that the American military attaché in Vientiane was still repeating the fifty-thousand figure. As the head of the *Time-Life* bureau in Indochina, H. D. S. Greenway, wrote, "The President's estimate of North Vietnamese troop strength in Laos was at least 17,000 higher than the highest reliable estimate in Vientiane, including the estimates of the Americans themselves."[23]

The fifty-thousand figure also merits comment. It does not distinguish forces in northern Laos (where the "invasion" took place) from those in the South, an extension of the Vietnam war. It does not distinguish combat troops from support and communication units, which military observers in Vientiane estimated at about three-fourths of the North Vietnamese force, not surprising since all supplies, including food, had to be brought through a heavily bombed area. It also might be recalled that U.S. planes bombing North Vietnam from Thai sanctuaries had been guided from American outposts in northern Laos, quite apart from the earlier history of subversion that Kissinger ignores. Arthur Dommen, an intensely anti-Communist American specialist on Laos, estimated that only one combat regiment of North Vietnamese troops was available in northern Laos in 1968. There is a mass of relevant evidence on the topic,[24] but what is striking is that in reviewing the "important" history, Kissinger mentions literally none of it, just as he excises the entire American role.

Let us turn next to Kissinger's "peace." According to his version, the massive bombing of North Vietnam in 1972 drove Hanoi to accept in October a peace plan even more favorable to the United States than "the terms we ourselves had put forward for two years" (1392). But after the November presidential election, Hanoi refused to negotiate, with typical insolence, so the United States had to carry out the Christmas bombings to compel them to accept U.S. terms in January. As always, Kissinger wisely avoids the available documentation, such as the texts of the October and January agreements or his public analyses of them at the time. But

even from the scattered and self-serving excerpts he selects, it is obvious that his story can hardly be taken seriously.

Space prevents a detailed analysis, but the basic facts are easily documented. The U.S. position had been that the GVN (Government of Vietnam, which, as Kissinger remarks, had been "put into office by a coup organized by our predecessors"; 1013), must remain as the government in the South, after which "free elections" might be held under its auspices; engagingly, Kissinger observes that "whoever controlled the government would win" (1031; see also 1311). The 1962 program of the National Liberation Front of South Vietnam (NLF) demanded a share (which would no doubt have become the dominant share) in the governance of South Vietnam, which was to form a neutral zone with Laos and Cambodia, following "an independent, sovereign foreign policy" and proceeding towards "step-by-step reunification" as agreed in the 1954 Geneva Accords. Naturally, the United States rejected any such idea, since it knew that its clients could not survive political competition in the South.[25] The central provision of the October 1972 agreement was that there are two administrations in the South, the GVN and the PRG (the former NLF), which are to proceed to a political settlement in the South, then to reunification with the North. In agreeing to this formula, the United States abandoned its long-term program of imposing the rule of the GVN on South Vietnam.

Since the United States was obviously delaying, Hanoi announced the terms of the agreement on October 26. Kissinger then appeared on television to announce that "peace is at hand." A careful reading of his statement, however, reveals that he was rejecting the central element of the agreement: that the PRG is parallel and equivalent to the GVN in the South. Obviously, peace was not "at hand." Kissinger then attempted to modify the agreements in various ways, leading to the Christmas bombings, after which the United States signed a treaty in Paris which differed in only the most insignificant respects from the October agreements—which Hanoi had been urging the United States to sign throughout the period when Kissinger claims that in their insolence, they were refusing to negotiate.

This, however, is only half the story. Exactly as in October, though more explicitly, Nixon and Kissinger announced at once that they would disregard the agreement that they signed in Paris in January. The treaty itself was based on the principle that the GVN and PRG were parallel and equivalent parties and that "foreign countries shall not impose any political tendency or personality on the South Vietnamese people." But the White House summary stated that "the government of the Republic of (South) Vietnam continues in existence, recognized by the United

States, its constitutional structure and leadership intact and unchanged." Nixon announced that the United States would continue to recognize and support the GVN as "the sole legitimate government of South Vietnam." Its constitutional structure, in an unamendable article, identified this government as representing all of Vietnam and stated that "every activity designed to propagandize or carry out communism is prohibited" —so much for the guaranteed open political competition of the treaty. To dispel any doubt, the Thieu regime announced at once that it would repress by force any support shown for the second of the two parties in the South. Furthermore, it did so; and, as all serious observers agree, in essence, the GVN went on the offensive in 1973 (with full U.S. backing), while the "enemy" responded in 1974.[26]

In short, the text of the agreements of October and January represented a major concession by Kissinger, whereas the interpretation of the text provided by Kissinger and Nixon maintained their long-standing commitment to impose the rule of the U.S. client regime in the South in defiance of the scrap of paper signed in Paris, leading to renewed warfare largely initiated by the U.S.-GVN and ultimately retaliation from the Communist enemy and the overthrow of the U.S.-imposed regime. A very different story from the one that Kissinger relates, but a story with the virtue of accuracy, and one quite obvious at the time to anyone whose eyes were open, crucially not the American press.[27]

Kissinger was aided in his deceit by the fact that the media largely accepted his version of the agreements, which rejected their basic principles, as if it were the text itself. Thus the basis was laid for great indignation when there was a military response to GVN land-grabbing operations, which U.S. officials were proudly announcing through early 1974. From the actual history, the Christmas bombings emerge as simply another chapter in a long history of murderous cynicism.

The truth can even be disentangled from Kissinger's obfuscation. Thus, Kissinger reports a letter from Nixon on October 19, 1972, stating that "the GVN must survive as a free country" (sic), backing Kissinger's message to Thieu that "the government we have recognized [the GVN] is the government of the Republic of South Vietnam and its President" (sic; 1369, 1353). The reason for Kissinger's rejection of the treaty he signed was the familiar one; as Ambassador Bunker told Nixon and Kissinger on August 31, 1972, the GVN "fear that they are not yet well enough organized to compete politically with such a tough disciplined organization" (1324). Kissinger notes that he thought at the end "that Saigon [the GVN], generously armed and supported by the United States, would be able to deal with moderate violations of the agreements" (1359), though Watergate foiled this plan; nothing is said about the U.S.-GVN violations which

demolished the treaty in 1973, in accordance with Washington's clear rejection of its terms. On January 6, 1973, Nixon stated that "he would settle for the October terms" (1462), destroying Kissinger's rationale for the Christmas bombings, as does the text of the January treaty itself. Kissinger concludes by noting that on January 21, Thieu requested "some unilateral statements by the United States that we recognized Saigon as the legal government of South Vietnam," which "was consistent with our interpretation of the agreement" (1470) though flatly inconsistent with its text, a fact that he considers too insignificant to deserve mention. And so on.

As usual, Kissinger has succeeded in establishing his version of history among his sympathetic Western audience. Thus, the British military historian Michael Howard, reviewing the memoirs in the *Times Literary Supplement* (December 21, 1979), writes that "those who opposed the [Christmas] bombing of Hanoi have not convincingly shown how else the North Vietnamese could be brought to negotiate."

Occasionally, Kissinger lets drop hints that at some level of awareness he understood the true nature of the American war. The problem we faced was that our enemy was "fighting on familiar terrain," fighting a political war against our military war (232). The basic problem we faced was "psychological": "How does one convince a people that one is prepared to stay indefinitely 10,000 miles away against opponents who are fighting in their own country?" where "the Viet Cong infrastructure undermined the South Vietnamese government in the populated countryside," while the North Vietnamese "tempted our forces to lunge into politically insignificant areas" (232–33). By 1969, after seven years of American attacks against the rural population and four years of all-out war, the U.S. embassy in Saigon "estimated that a Communist infrastructure still existed in 80 percent of the hamlets" (236)—though by then, much of the population had been "urbanized" by American military force. Kissinger asks an interagency committee, "How do we know what the infrastructure is that we've destroyed?" (434)—that is, does the social organization of our South Vietnamese enemy still survive, despite our attack? Another problem was that the army we organized in the South (ARVN) "would rapidly suffer desertions and loss of morale" if moved out of its home region, while the "North Vietnamese" could "hide in the population" (989–90); "attrition is next to impossible to apply in a guerrilla war against an enemy who does not *have* to fight because he can melt into the population" (34; his emphasis). Worse still, ARVN "only rarely" had "conducted major offensive operations against a determined enemy," confining itself to "usually unopposed sweeps of the countryside in support of pacification" (992, 1002), i.e., attacks on the civilian population of

the South. "The North Vietnamese hiding in the population and able to choose their moment for attack wore us down" (1005), referring to the pre-1968 period, when, as all agree (even Kissinger), the "enemy" was overwhelmingly South Vietnamese. Even though U.S. force had succeeded in "improving the military position of our ally," "Thieu and his government were simply not ready for a negotiated peace" (1046, 1323). From a scattering of statements of this sort, the truth emerges, despite Kissinger's heroic efforts to conceal it.

Throughout, Kissinger's memoirs keep to a comparable intellectual and moral level. Thus, he explains the "tilt to Pakistan" at the time of the atrocities in East Pakistan (which, it appears from his account, the United States never criticized, even in private) on the grounds that it was necessary to maintain the secrecy of the impending trip to China from Pakiston; the trip might otherwise have been delayed by several months (854). Putting aside the hypocrisy of this argument, why was it necessary to maintain secrecy? As he makes clear, China did not approve—indeed, it was much annoyed (740, 742). The only explanation for the secrecy is that the crucial "razzle-dazzle" would have been imperiled without it, so that much of the fun would have been lost. So much for the massacres in East Pakistan (Bangladesh).

Kissinger defends his efforts to subvert Chilean democracy on the grounds that the "anti-Allende vote" in 1970 was 62.7 percent (653). He notes, however, that the Christian Democratic vote (approximately equal to Allende's) went to a left-wing candidate "whose program differed from Allende's largely on procedural points and in his sincere dedication to the democratic process" (665). Thus the vote for Allende's program was actually two-thirds. As for Allende, "by definition his would be the last democratic election" (655), a pronouncement in blissful disregard of the fact that democratic elections continued under Allende, though never under the brutal regime that overthrew him in a U.S.-backed coup. A further proof that Allende was a committed totalitarian is that "various measures taken by Allende's government were declared to be unconstitutional and outside the law by the Chilean Supreme Court" (683)—so we conclude that F.D.R. too was a totalitarian. It is unnecessary to discuss Kissinger's account further; it is effectively demolished, with the documentation that Kissinger scrupulously avoids, by Armando Uribe in *Le Monde diplomatique* (December 1979). To cite only one example, Kissinger claims that on receiving a message of congratulation from Nixon, "Allende gave no evidence of a conciliatory approach. The tenor of his administration was set" (680), so that one obviously cannot blame the United States for the deterioration of relations. Kissinger does not quote Allende's response. Uribe does, citing long passages from the official

document in which Allende expressed the desire of his government "to maintain good relations with the United States" on the basis of mutual recognition of the "dignity" and "national interests" of the other party, among other reasonable and conciliatory remarks. Again, one can see why Kissinger is so careful to avoid documentation.

Not always, however. Thus Kissinger's claims concerning North Vietnamese sanctuaries are "confirmed" by a propaganda document issued by the Pol Pot government in late 1978 which was a bitter attack on Vietnam in the midst of a war in which the Pol Pot regime was facing annihilation. To this historian, the document provides credible evidence "confirming" American charges against Vietnam. Kissinger does not even refer to the document, absurd as that would be, but rather to press reports concerning it (241, 506).

Occasionally, Kissinger makes the mistake of actually citing a source that is easily checked. Thus he claims that William Shawcross "excused the Khmer Rouge atrocities" and that Richard Dudman "alleged that there was insufficient evidence the atrocities ever took place" (1485). Turning to his sources, we discover that Shawcross bitterly denounced the atrocities, concluding that the Khmer Rouge had turned Cambodia into a "hell on earth." Shawcross reports correctly that the ferocious American bombings of 1973 decimated the peasant army and cites official records which show that heavily populated areas were being intensively bombed by B-52s. State Department studies and other sources confirm that Khmer Rouge policies became far harsher in 1973. A former Foreign Service officer in Phnom Penh, now an academic specialist on Cambodia, testified before Congress that "the leadership hardened its ideology" in 1973–74 and that the incredible bombing of 1973 "may have driven thousands of people out of their minds"; "to a large extent, I think, American actions are to blame" for postwar atrocities (David Chandler).[28] Try as he may, Kissinger cannot alter the facts with false accusations leveled against people who have exposed his machinations, any more than he can provide an answer to Lon Nol's ambassador to Washington, who said, as the war ended: "Let's face it, you took advantage of us, of our inexperience. As you are much cleverer than we are, you could induce us into this fighting . . . . If the United States had respected our neutrality then the fighting, the killing and things might not have happened."[29]

Kissinger's allegations concerning Dudman are no less scandalous. Dudman never questioned that ample evidence of atrocities existed. Rather, he raised questions about reliance on Vietnamese sources in the midst of a war and about the way evidence was used to determine the *scale* of the deaths and killings, questions that would be recognized as pertinent

by any serious person, though it is hardly surprising that they lie far beyond Kissinger's comprehension.

Kissinger's sections on the Middle East—presented with characteristic self-adulation—review the early stages of his blunders, which were a major factor in setting the stage for the October 1973 war, specifically, his rejection of Sadat's repeated overtures in 1971–72 and his blind insistence on interpreting the Arab-Israel conflict as part of a global Russian challenge. As always, he makes no mention of the U.S. role in stimulating conflict—for example, the vast flow of armaments to Israel (including Phantom jets, which began to arrive in September 1969), which enabled it to undertake the "deep penetration" raids in Egypt that precipitated the entry of Russian antiaircraft systems and military personnel, and to bomb the Suez zone so intensively that a million and a half people were driven out, according to former Israeli Chief-of-Staff Mordechai Gur. The Israeli ambassador to Washington, Yitzhak Rabin, reports his understanding that the Nixon Administration favored the Israeli "deep penetration" raids and even further escalation, so as to undermine Nasser.[30] We learn nothing about any of this from Kissinger.

Similarly, in the Jordan crisis of 1970, Kissinger sees a Russian hand —they were "not helping to rein in their clients" (609). William Quandt, who was deputy to Harold Saunders (Kissinger's senior staff assistant on the Middle East) from 1972 to 1974, comments on the basic "flaw" in Nixon's and Kissinger's view of the crisis, namely, their emphasis on its "global U.S.-Soviet dimension," whereas in fact "the Soviet adopted a cautious policy" and "warned against all outside intervention in Jordan," calling for a cease-fire.[31] Kissinger describes the same facts quite differently, interpreting the Russian position as "Soviet premonitions, following our strategy of creating maximum fear of a possible American move" (627).

Kissinger makes clear that "there was no White House support at all" for State Department efforts to secure a settlement in 1971 (1279), well after Sadat's offers to make peace on the pre-June 1967 borders, in essential accord with the State Department's "Rogers Plan." Kissinger's aim "was to produce a stalemate until Moscow urged compromise or until, even better, some moderate Arab regime decided that the route to progress was through Washington" (1279)—as Sadat surely had, though Kissinger did not understand this. Even after Sadat's "massive purge of pro-Soviet elements in his government" (1283), the light did not dawn. "Until some Arab state showed a willingness to separate from the Soviets, or the Soviets were prepared to dissociate from the maximum Arab program, we had no reason to modify our policy" of stalemate (1291)—a statement that is remarkable not only for its colossal ignorance (Saudi Arabia, for

example, was not willing "to separate from the Soviets"?) but also for its obtuseness in refusing to move towards peace out of absurd "geopolitical" fantasies.

Quandt's plausible conclusion is that Sadat "had risked his relations with the Soviet Union by moving against its supporters and by helping to crush a communist coup in Sudan in July. Not only had he failed to win the Americans to his side, but the Americans were considering new arms agreements with Israel. Frustrated and humiliated, Sadat decided to abandon the interim-settlement idea. The result was a two-year diplomatic stalemate," ended after the October 1973 war.

The quite surprising early successes of Egyptian and Syrian military forces in October 1973, which led even a reluctant Saudi Arabia to join in a petroleum boycott, succeeded in penetrating the clouds. If there is one thing that Kissinger does indeed understand, it is the mailed fist. Recognizing that Egypt was not a basket case, as he had previously assumed, and that the oil-producing states could not be dismissed entirely as an independent force in world affairs (as oil company executives had been privately warning for some time),[32] Kissinger changed tactics, accepting Sadat's long-standing offers to convert Egypt into a client state of the United States. He then turned to the policies that will no doubt be described with equal accuracy and perception in the second volume of his memoirs, seeking to incorporate Egypt within the U.S.-dominated system while removing it from the Middle East conflict by "step-by-step diplomacy" so that Israel could maintain its control over the occupied territories and its dominant political-military position in the region as an American surrogate, within the Iran–Israel–Saudi Arabia alliance that was at the time regarded as the basis for U.S. domination of the region.[33] But this carries us beyond our story here; volume one of the memoirs terminates before these events took place.

Kissinger notes that in September 1971, the USSR indicated its willingness "to withdraw its combat forces from Egypt in case of a final settlement" along the lines of Sadat's rebuffed offer, but "we had no incentive to proceed jointly with Moscow" because "there was no sign of the Soviet Union's willingness to press its clients toward flexibility" (838, 1288), where "flexibility," not defined, amounted to acceptance of Israeli control of territories occupied in 1967. The real story is that he assumed that "equilibrium," in his special sense of the term, would be served by maintaining the Israeli dominance that he regarded as unchallengeable—until forced to revise his assumptions after the October war to which he contributed so effectively.

Kissinger's memoirs abound in examples of the sort I have discussed. They reveal the enormous dangers posed to peace, minimal jus-

tice or humanity, even survival, by a combination of limited understanding, tremendous military force, and willingness to show "courage" by "going to the brink." The one great talent that Kissinger manifests here, as throughout his career, is a capacity to befuddle the media and public opinion. Academic scholarship also takes his preposterous statements about international affairs and his "geopolitical" inanities quite seriously, even in critical commentary. As for the media, to take a perhaps extreme example, the book review editor of the *Boston Globe*, who finds Kissinger "perceptive" and "humane" in his memoirs, writes that "either we accept, or try to accept, what he is saying, given his massive ego, or wait for 20 or more years before making a judgment."[34] No other reaction is imaginable.

In fact, a rather different assessment is suggested by one of the more profound thoughts that graced Kissinger's academic writings—his explanation that "the deepest problem of the contemporary international order" may derive from the failure on the part of people outside the West, who have not undergone the Newtonian revolution, to understand that "the real world is external to the observer."[35] Reading these memoirs, one might conclude that Kissinger is really a man of the sixteenth century, in his weird sense.

A review of Kissinger's version of history should not be confused with an account of his actions while in a position of political power from 1969 to 1975. This is not the place to undertake the latter task. An account of his tenure in office would focus on other topics, such as the recognition by Nixon and Kissinger of the fact that the period of undisputed U.S. global hegemony was at an end, and that it would henceforth be necessary to come to terms with certain facts of the international order. Their moves towards "détente" amounted to an acceptance of long-standing Soviet efforts to construct a world system of bipolar management, in which each of the superpowers would control its own domains without essential interference, though with some skirmishing in disputed territory and the right to exploit targets of opportunity. They also responded to Chinese efforts to join this global system, and sought, as any rational advocates of U.S. power would, to play the USSR and China against one another to the extent possible. Furthermore, after a brief experiment with neomercantilist policies in 1971, Nixon and Kissinger recognized that it would be necessary to adopt what was later called a "trilateralist" position with regard to the First World of industrial capitalism, with Europe and Japan brought into a collective management in which, however, the board of directors would remain in Washington. After his disastrous management of Middle Eastern affairs leading to the October war, Kissinger moved towards a position of rational imperialism in this region too, as

noted above. Throughout the world, Nixon and Kissinger attempted to develop a system of surrogate states (e.g., Iran) which would manage the affairs of their own region in the U.S. interest, a position that proved only marginally successful, though it accorded with the realities of diminishing U.S. power relative to other rising power centers. The USSR faces similar dilemmas, contrary to much contemporary fantasy. As for Indochina, while Kissinger did not succeed in maintaining a U.S. client state in South Vietnam, he was successful in the larger objective of creating sufficient carnage so that the threatening prospect of postwar recovery and successful development was averted, a policy pursued by his successors by other means.

If we accept the assumptions of U.S. policymakers, these are not inconsiderable achievements. That Kissinger was able to realize them, despite his obviously limited grasp of world affairs and his fantastic interpretations of contemporary history, is a reflection of the enormous power of the United States, which, while not on the scale of earlier years relative to its rivals (including its allies), is still immense. With such reserves of power at one's command, it is difficult to fail to achieve many of the objectives of U.S. foreign policy. What made Kissinger particularly useful as a manager of state policy, however, was not his intermittent grasp of the realities of power but rather his remarkable capacity to mislead and confuse the public, particularly, the articulate intelligentsia. This is an art that he mastered with near genius, as the reception of these generally ridiculous memoirs once again illustrates.