



Jussi M. Hanhimäki, “‘Dr. Kissinger’ or ‘Mr. Henry’? Kissingerology, Thirty Years and Counting,” *Diplomatic History*, Volume 27, Issue 5 (November 2003): 637-676.

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Observing that Henry A. Kissinger remains both a positive and negative icon in American foreign policy long after his stints as assistant to the president for national security affairs and secretary of state, Professor Jussi Hanhimäki sets out in his November 2003 article in *Diplomatic History* to explore the past and future directions of “Kissingerology,” which is his short-hand phrase for studies published since 1973 about Kissinger’s policy-making. In the beginning and until recently, Hanhimäki argues, most or all Kissingerologists placed their subject in either one of two categories: “Dr. Kissinger” or “Mr. Henry.” As “Dr. Kissinger” he was “the prince of realpolitik who put his remarkable insights to the service of a nation in deep trouble.” As “Mr. Henry” he was “the power-hungry, bureaucratic schemer bent on self-aggrandizement.” Hanhimäki maintains that although this binary typology continues to describe analyses by some Kissingerologists, such as those by Robert Kaplan and Christopher Hitchens, it is “undergoing a massive overhaul” (638), because scholars are now able to draw on recent declassifications of archival documents.

The issues and events Hanhimäki discusses are mainly those “that took up the majority of Kissinger’s time” (640) while he served as national security assistant between 1969 and 1973: detente with the Soviet Union, rapprochement with China, “the search for an end to the Vietnam War” (640), and the associated strategies of linkage and triangular diplomacy. Considering the immense number of books and articles about Nixon administration foreign policy, and given the space constraints within which he was writing, it is understandable that Hanhamaki was unable to give much or any attention to contextual factors (like bureaucratic infighting, ideology, domestic politics, budgetary constraints, Kissinger’s worldview, and so on) and to other significant policy events and issues; for example, Ostpolitik, the Indo-Pakistani War, nuclear strategy, arms control, African crises, Mideast negotiations, the Jordanian crisis, the overthrow and assassination of Chilean president Salvador Allende, the October 1973 War, the Polish uprising, the Angolan Civil War, the Indonesian invasion of East Timor, and economic foreign policy (e.g., the international monetary crisis of 1971 and the Arab oil embargo of 1973). His forthcoming book on Kissinger and American foreign policy will no doubt take up these matters to one degree or another.

Somewhat baffling, however, is the absence of a discussion about the Nixon-Kissinger relationship. Besides one or two passing references to Nixon administration foreign policy, time and again Hanhimäki writes of “Kissinger’s foreign policy,” “Kissinger’s detente” (655), and so on. It is true that in some circles Kissinger has been seen as the mastermind of Nixon-era diplomacy, but based on what we now know from memoirs and abundant textual documents and audio-taped White House conversations, President Richard M. Nixon was very much the master of his own house (until perhaps the Watergate scandal made itself felt by mid-1973). A strong

case can be made that it was Nixon who was mostly the grand strategist of administration policy, while Kissinger was the able tactician who provided the options papers and carried out negotiations on the details of the strategy, or who helped keep Nixon on track concerning a particular plan. Kissinger may have been an essential assistant, but Nixon was deeply involved in the making of his administration's foreign policy, and he sometimes played Secretary of State William Rogers off against Kissinger. Moreover, there were other decision-making actors. We now know from textual documents and White House tapes declassified since the mid 1990s that Nixon often spoke privately with H. R. Haldeman about foreign policy and that Haldeman had an influence on the general direction of policy, as did, of course, Alexander Haig. Further, we have long known that even though Nixon and Kissinger often excluded Secretary of State Rogers and Secretary of Defense Melvin Laird from the making of key strategic and policy decisions, the bureaucracies they headed exerted influence on or obstructed the implementation of these.

In any event, and despite this and other omissions, Hanhimäki's article demonstrates his knowledge and mastery of the literature. An experienced international scholar who has written previously on American foreign relations, Hanhimäki generally succeeds in his purpose while also providing readers with copious bibliographical footnotes relevant to Kissingerology.

Concerning the topics and events he does take up--detente, rapprochement, and the termination of the Vietnam war-- Hanhimäki asks a very long list of questions of the historiography, among which the following attract most of his attention:

- Were Kissinger's actions moral or immoral (640, 674)? Did he have a "dark side" (639, 675)?
- Was the "coup d'etat" that marginalized State Department contributions to the making of Nixon-administration policy "justified" by successes in detente and rapprochement (639)?
- Did Kissinger have shortcomings as a policy-maker and diplomat? If so, what were they (640, 654, 656)?
- Did he act like the realist he claimed to be (640)?
- Was detente, as Kissinger envisioned it, a structure for peace or a strategy to manage the Soviet Union (648)?
- Was "Kissinger's detente a complete failure" (655)?
- What caused the decline of detente (653)?
- Did Kissinger's trip to Beijing in July 1971 radically alter the U.S.-Soviet relationship in favor of the United States (656)?
- Were the Soviets caught off-guard by the "China opening" (656)?
- Did rapprochement with China bring immediate substantive successes (656)?

-Why did rapprochement's promising beginning fall flat (660)?

-Did Kissinger seek a "decent-interval solution" for the Vietnam War (638, 664)?

-Did Kissinger's triangular diplomacy help bring an end to the Vietnam War; namely, did it put pressure on Hanoi to compromise at the negotiating table (665)?

Hanhimäki answers that detente was not a "complete" failure, for its successes included "summitry as a permanent feature of Soviet-American relations" and the "opening to China" (655). He finds that Kissinger's shortcomings included his "inability to act in a multilateral diplomatic context" (654). Concerning rapprochement, Hanhimäki argues that it soon fell flat because of the inherent flaws in triangular diplomacy and the "perceptions" of the Chinese about the United States (661).

About many if not most of the other questions, however, Hanhimäki's reading of the literature and the evidence leads him to inconclusive answers. One of the several reasons for this, I think, lies in the form of the questions he has asked; that is, many of these incorporate what historian David Hackett Fischer long ago called the logical fallacies of contingency (one part of the answer depends on the answer to another part), normative judgment (the question is not only about empirically verifiable facts or hypotheses but also about moral values), and false dichotomy. As an example of false dichotomy, why does Kissinger have to be either "Dr. Kissinger" or "Mr. Henry"? The abundant available evidence actually reveals a more complex personality. Kissinger was both the practitioner of realpolitik and the bureaucratic schemer. Furthermore, he, like Nixon, was often an impractical philosophical "idealist," who unrealistically fought unwinnable wars and sought unattainable goals in defense of preserving his notion of American credibility. Within the Oval Office, moreover, Kissinger was just "Henry": Henry the courtier, who flattered Nixon in order to maintain his favor; or he was Henry the intelligent assistant, whom Nixon needed for both his loyalty and his talented staff's options papers. Kissinger could also be "Dr. Strangelove," supporting or egging Nixon on in his nuclear ploys, madman stratagems, and coup plots when others did not, while adding an intellectualized gloss to Nixon's fierce instincts. In addition, Nixon not infrequently thought of Kissinger as his in-house Harvard doctor who had useful links to the Eastern Establishment. When he was frustrated with the progress of negotiations, Nixon could also think of Kissinger as a loquacious professor who was too interested in debating grand ideas with Communist leaders to be an effective negotiator.

Kissinger was all these things and more. People are complex, and the complexities of people with great power and celebrity become exaggerated. But these complexities are not necessarily mutually exclusive or unfathomable. We can discover and explain them as long as we have adequate evidence. Indeed, in Kissinger's case, we do have this body of evidence, and several journalists and historians, including this author, have drawn from it to paint textured portraits of Kissinger's complex personality, mentality, and behavior, works which Hanhimäki does not adequately explore.

There are several other questions Hanhimäki asks that can, I think, be answered with empirical evidence but which Hanhimäki treats as part of a Kissingerological argument without end. One

of these is the matter of whether or not in the hands of Nixon and Kissinger, detente was a strategy designed to ensnare the Soviets in a web of their making. Raymond Garthoff and other historians, including this reviewer, have demonstrated that on the basis of available evidence this was indeed the case. Nixon and Kissinger may have intended that detente would also lead to a structure of peace, but it is clear that this structure was designed to contain the Soviets and bring about a kind of peace that benefited mainly the interests of the United States as defined by the White House. Another answerable question is the one about whether Nixon and Kissinger pursued a decent-interval solution for the Vietnam War, the meaning of which is widely misunderstood. I have written and spoken at length about this (with more to come in a soon-to-be-published book and an article) and will not belabor the point, except to say that the evidence is now overwhelming that they did pursue such a “solution”—although we need to understand what Nixon and Kissinger meant by decent-interval, a meaning that is revealed by both the old and the new evidence.

To his great credit, Hanhimäki raises and capably addresses these and many other worthwhile issues. Kissingerologists, Nixonologists, and others interested in international affairs will reap substantial benefits from his article.

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