

H-Diplo ROUNDTABLE XXII-32

Thomas A. Schwartz. *Henry Kissinger and American Power: A Political Biography.* New York: Hill and Wang, 2020. ISBN: 9780809095377 (hardcover, \$35.00).

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INTRODUCTION BY JUSSI M. HANHIMÄKI, GRADUATE INSTITUTE OF INTERNATIONAL AND DEVELOPMENT STUDIES, GENEVA

Henry Alfred Kissinger is probably the most famous European-born American policy maker of the Cold War era. The only person to have held the offices of secretary of state and national security adviser simultaneously (1973-1975), Kissinger is also extremely controversial. He is widely recognized as the man who engineered the opening with China, détente with the Soviet Union, and the agreements that ended the 1973 October War in the Middle East. But Kissinger has also been reviled for his fondness for secrecy, his support for expanding the Vietnam War to Cambodia, and his push for the overthrow of the democratically elected socialist Chilean president Salvador Allende. Critics have further targeted Kissinger's penchant for realpolitik, which arguably caused him to ignore the moral underpinnings of American foreign policy.

These long-standing and heated controversies have been the subject of an endless flow of books and articles over the past half-century.¹ One is hence compelled to ask whether a new book on Kissinger is really necessary. Is there something that we do not yet know about the career of the 56th secretary of state? This is, more or less, the first question that the three reviewers of Thomas Schwartz's book ask. Schwartz's answer is, in essence, twofold. First, Kissinger has been, to an extent, forgotten; the man who enjoyed virtual rock star celebrity in the 1970s may still enjoy broad name recognition but his actual career – his policy achievements and failures – are so far removed from our fast-moving twenty-first century world that they appear anachronistic at best. Second, much of the scholarship and journalism has sidestepped the impact of domestic politics on Kissinger's decision-making.

The three reviewers broadly agree with Schwartz's rationale. They all express appreciation for the author's earnest aim to 'introduce' Henry Kissinger to younger audiences who have but scant knowledge or understanding of the controversies that has, for so long, been a trademark of Kissingerology. Second, the reviewers concur that the distinctive scholarly contribution of Schwartz's book is the emphasis he puts on domestic policy as a key determinant behind Kissinger's decision-making.

Where disagreement emerges is, not surprisingly, on how the reviewers react to Schwartz's effort to strike a non-polemic middle ground between the legion of extreme critics and fawning admirers. For Carolyn Eisenberg, Schwartz fails to probe deeply into the controversies surrounding the human costs of some of the Nixon-Kissinger era foreign policy decisions (Vietnam, Chile). Although she credits the book for "comprehensiveness and accessibility," Eisenberg finds that "in his effort to write a fair-minded account of Henry Kissinger's long career, Schwartz sidesteps the human consequences of his choices."

In contrast, Susan Colbourn opines that Schwartz "offers a balanced and nuanced portrait" of the former secretary of state. She particularly praises the emphasis on Kissinger's public persona that – for the newer generation at least – is one of the most curious aspects of a career that began with a doctoral thesis about the Congress of Vienna. Colbourn further credits Schwartz for his detailed coverage of Kissinger's post-secretarial years that are probably worth a book or two in their own right.

If Eisenberg and Colbourn's reviews provide a contrast that is reminiscent of the long-lasting controversy that surrounds (the now 97-year-old) Kissinger, Mario Del Pero's review provides the most surprising twist. In effect, Del Pero interprets Schwartz's extensive emphasis on domestic politics and desire for personal popularity as a "perhaps unintentional" attack on Kissinger's originality and intellectual capabilities. "It is," Del Pero concludes, "hard to imagine a more damning critique for

¹ A few notable and relatively examples include Niall Ferguson, *Kissinger: The Idealist, 1923-1968* (New York: Penguin, 2015); Greg Grandin, *Kissinger's Shadow: The Long Reach of America's Most Controversial Statesman* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2015); Winston Lord, *Kissinger on Kissinger* (New York: All Points Books, 2015). For a detailed – but significantly out-of-date – historiographical review, see Jussi M. Hanhimäki, "'Dr. Kissinger' or 'Mr. Henry'? Kissingerology, Thirty Years and Counting," *Diplomatic History* 27:5 (November 2003): 637-676.

someone who built his unique fame on his alleged intellectual prowess,” than the one found in *Henry Kissinger and American Power*.

In the end, the three reviews illustrate why Kissingerology continues to revolve around debates over whether ‘HAK’ represents the good, the bad, or the ugly of American foreign policy. It is an argument without end. This basically means that for all the considerable merits of Schwartz’s work, it is unlikely to remain, for very long, the last word on the subject.

Participants:

Jussi M. Hanhimäki is Professor of International History at the Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies. He is the author, among other works, of *The Flawed Architect: Henry Kissinger and American Foreign Policy* (New York, 2004) and *The Rise and Fall of Détente: American Foreign Policy and the Transformation of the Cold War* (Washington, D.C., 2013). His latest book is *Pax Transatlantica: America and Europe in the Post-Cold War Era*, to be published by Oxford University Press in the spring of 2021.

Susan Colbourn is a DAAD postdoctoral fellow at Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies. She is currently completing a transatlantic history of the Euromissiles and is at work on an international history of NATO’s Cold War.

Mario Del Piero is Professor of International History at the Institut d’études politiques SciencesPo of Paris. He is currently writing a book on a group of Texan evangelical missionaries in early Cold War Italy where he tries to apply the methods and insights of micro-history to the study of the Global Cold War.

Carolyn Eisenberg is a professor of American history and U.S. foreign policy at Hofstra University. Her book *Drawing the Line the American Decision to Divide Germany, 1944-49* was awarded the Stuart Bernath Prize, the Herbert Hoover Library Prize and was a finalist for the Lionel Gelber Award. She has completed a manuscript, *Never Lose: Nixon, Kissinger and the Illusion of National Security*

REVIEW BY SUSAN COLBOURN, JOHNS HOPKINS SCHOOL OF ADVANCED
INTERNATIONAL STUDIES

Do we really need another book about Henry Kissinger? Given the sheer number already out there, and the flurry of recent publications about the former national security adviser and secretary of state, what is there left to say?²

Thomas Schwartz convinced me that we do — or, at the very least, did, before the publication of *Henry Kissinger and American Power*.

Schwartz charts a careful course in this political biography. He is determined to avoid the charged landscape surrounding Kissinger; claims that Kissinger was a ‘war criminal’ do appear in the text, but as historical evidence in their own right, part of the book’s broader aim to account for Kissinger’s career, his influence, and his significance, and not as judgements from the author. *Henry Kissinger and American Power* is explicitly aimed at a younger generation, “an attempt,” as Schwartz puts it, “to explain who Henry Kissinger was, what he thought, what he did, and why it matters” (5).

At this task Schwartz excels. *Henry Kissinger and American Power* offers an overview of the broad contours of Kissinger’s life and career that touches on critical moments from the Vietnam War and the opening to the People’s Republic of China to his shuttle diplomacy in the Middle East. Schwartz deftly covers these issues, often encapsulating complicated issues with both clarity and concision. Take, for example, the ins and outs of the Strategic Arms Limitation Talks (SALT) during Gerald Ford’s presidency. Within a few short pages, Schwartz sums up the complicated bureaucratic wrangling over cruise missile options, the new Soviet Backfire bomber, and the Secretary’s desire to secure an agreement on SALT II in order to shore up Ford’s 1976 campaign. I would have liked to have read more about Kissinger’s frustration with the Federal Republic of Germany’s pursuit of *Ostpolitik* (especially given Schwartz’s earlier work on transatlantic relations) and the deliberations surrounding the New International Economic Order.³ A fuller discussion of both would have added even more texture to an already rich discussion of Kissinger’s diplomatic style.

What sets *Henry Kissinger and American Power* apart is not new details but the portrait of Kissinger as a fundamentally political animal. “He recognized,” Schwartz argues, “the centrality of politics to foreign policy and knew how deeply intertwined with the American system foreign policy and domestic politics were” (10).

Central to Kissinger’s political instincts was his celebrity. Schwartz’s sources speak to this immense and evolving celebrity at home and abroad, as does the book’s structure. Each of the seven chapters opens with a vignette; each is a brief episode from the fulsome television coverage of Kissinger, drawn from the Vanderbilt Television News Archive. Chapter 3, for instance, begins with reactions to a Kissinger press briefing in January 1972. In one TV spot, Dan Rather of CBS introduced Kissinger as a “Secretary of State without title, swinging bachelor ladies’ man, masterful explainer, propaganda artist, [and] skilled briefer” (120). Coverage like this offers a glimpse into Kissinger’s public persona during the early 1970s, an

² See, for some recent examples, Barry Gewen, *The Inevitability of Tragedy: Henry Kissinger and His World* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2020); Robert K. Brigham, *Reckless: Henry Kissinger and the Tragedy of Vietnam* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2018); Niall Ferguson, *Kissinger, 1923-1968: The Idealist* (New York: Penguin, 2015); Greg Grandin, *Kissinger’s Shadow: The Long Reach of America’s Most Controversial Statesman* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2015).

³ Thomas Alan Schwartz, *America’s Germany: John J. McCloy and the Federal Republic of Germany* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001); Thomas Alan Schwartz, *Lyndon Johnson and Europe: In the Shadow of Vietnam* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003); Matthias Schulz and Thomas A. Schwartz, eds., *The Strained Alliance: U.S.-European Relations from Nixon to Carter* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

introduction for those of a younger generation who are unfamiliar with — and likely a bit baffled by — Kissinger’s ‘sex appeal’ and, for that matter, the days of news coverage from three television channels.

This focus on celebrity culminates in the final chapter and epilogue, as Schwartz traces Kissinger’s trajectory after leaving office in January 1977. In the years and decades since, Kissinger has been a perennial commentator, an author, a high-profile consultant, and an unusual celebrity, even appearing, as Schwartz reminds us, in a Stephen Colbert sketch set to the music stylings of Daft Punk. The twists and turns of Kissinger’s post-secretarial years are fascinating — and Schwartz brings them to life with colorful detail. At times, I wondered where episodes of Kissingerian commentary I have run across in my own research might fit in this arc, like the kerfuffle he caused in transatlantic relations when, in the autumn of 1979, he remarked that “we must face the fact that it is absurd to base the strategy of the West on the credibility of mutual suicide.”⁴ But these are selfish curiosities. If anything, the fact that Kissinger’s career out of office has been, not unlike his eight years in office, too sizable and varied to cover in its entirety is yet another sign of Kissinger’s enduring significance. Certainly, Schwartz leaves no doubt on this front, recounting, for instance, the 2008 election where Democrats and Republicans alike burnished their foreign policy credentials with references to Kissinger’s diplomacy.

Henry Kissinger and American Power is engaging and extraordinarily well-written, and will appeal to a wide audience seeking to understand how the proverbial sausage of U.S. foreign policy gets made. Schwartz offers a balanced and nuanced portrait of Kissinger and does so in a way that, at once, introduces Kissinger to a new audience and offers new insights to those already very familiar with Kissinger’s career.

⁴ Paul Lewis, “U.S. Pledge to NATO To Use Nuclear Arms Criticized by Kissinger,” *The New York Times*, September 2, 1979.

REVIEW BY MARIO DEL PERO, SCIENCESPO, PARIS

Secretary of State and National Security Advisor Henry Kissinger “was said to have a taste for stardom, that he was a foreign policy *prima donna*,” France’s Foreign Minister Michel Jobert mused during the 1973 Middle East crisis. He concluded, “But I believe his taste was for politics. He is a politician above else” (10). While fairly conventional in its structure and in the selection of the issues on which it focuses, from Vietnam to the opening to China, and from the SALT negotiations to Kissinger’s virtuoso Middle East shuttle diplomacy, Thomas Schwartz’s very fine political biography of Kissinger tackles an angle that is often overlooked in the never receding field of ‘Kissingerology’: how domestic political concerns and necessities inform and shape foreign policy discourse and policies. In Schwartz’s apt and original rendering, Kissinger, the erudite realist intellectual called to provide conceptual coherence and historical depth to the U.S. approach to international matters, is in fact a quintessential political actor: a “politician, and a man who understood that American foreign policy is fundamentally shaped and determined by the struggles and battles of American domestic politics” (9). In adopting this approach and in spite of a narrative that at times is a bit dry and over dense, Schwartz offers a remarkably intelligent and sensible assessment of Kissinger’s years in government: possibly the best we have to date.

Quite orthodox in its structure, the book is divided into three parts. The first is a sort of biographical snapshot covering the period prior to President Richard Nixon’s fateful decision to appoint Kissinger as his National Security Adviser. The second – the bulk of the volume – deals with Kissinger’s tenure as in that position and, later, Secretary of State in the Nixon and Ford administrations. The third, remarkably rich and original, covers the post-governmental years, Kissinger’s frequent attempts to get a second stint in the Republican administrations of the 1980s and 90s, and his work as a much sought (and handsomely remunerated) consultant and media pundit.

In intention, Schwartz’s is a very balanced examination of Kissinger’s intellectual and political parable, neither prejudicially critical nor too laudatory: a solid middle ground between the numerous ‘war criminal’ condemnations and the many ‘Super K’ hagiographies, old and new.⁵ Schwartz praises the coherence of Kissinger’s vision and strategy, his awareness of the limits of post-Vietnam American power, and his ability to defend the national interest by fine-tuning foreign policy according to these new limits and constraints. According to Schwartz, “Kissinger understood the limits of American power” (118). His ascendancy in the Nixon administration owed a lot “to his bureaucratic maneuvering, his skill with the media, and his relationship with Nixon,” but “it also stemmed from his ability to discuss foreign policy in new ways, and his language of retrenchment and realism was perfectly coordinated with the political mood of the nation” (118).

Schwartz convincingly shows how Kissinger well understood that domestic legitimacy was the key precondition to an effective foreign policy and that, somehow circularly, the latter served to score domestic political victories, reinforcing the administration and rendering it even more capable of dealing effectively with international challenges and changes. “While not a traditional politician (Kissinger’s foreign birth precluded him from running for president, and he did not hold rallies, kiss babies, or give formal campaign speeches),” Schwartz writes “he recognized the centrality of politics to foreign policy and knew how deeply intertwined within the American system foreign policy and domestic politics were. He adjusted his perspective and recommendations accordingly.” (10)

But Kissinger’s attention to (if not obsession for) domestic politics, and his willingness to blend foreign policy choices and initiatives in order to score political (and, for his boss, electoral) victories at home, had also another, less virtuous objective: they helped to strengthen him bureaucratically, within the administrations he served, and publicly, in his continuous search for popularity, appreciation, and approval. Foreign policy was ‘personalized’ as never before, Schwartz reminds us, transforming Kissinger into a sort of media celebrity, revered by the many journalists he incessantly cultivated and aptly manipulated. On this Schwartz does not really break new ground, although he intelligently uses a primary source, TV news, that scholars still often neglect. Thanks to the historical record, Kissinger skills at self-promotion and his duplicitous

⁵ For two perfect examples of this interpretative polarity, see Christopher Hitchens, *The Trial of Henry Kissinger* (New York: Verso, 2001) and the more recent Niall Ferguson, *Kissinger the Idealist, 1923-1968* (New York: Penguin, 2015).

propensity to flatter and denigrate the very same person (including Nixon) are well known and documented. And yet, the reader cannot but be shocked by how brazen Kissinger could be, either as the ruthless bureaucratic infighter, ready to use all possible tricks to marginalize his potential competitors (beginning with Nixon's first Secretary of State, William Rogers) or as the "consummate courtier" (117) of the Presidents he served (or those he thought he could serve, including the hopeless Vice-President Dan Quayle, whom Kissinger described to his liberal friend Arthur Schlesinger Jr. as "well-informed and intelligent," which accordingly to Schlesinger meant "that Quayle listens reverently to Henry and that Henry thinks Quayle may be President someday" (381).

The interpretation Schwartz offers, with its emphasis on Kissinger's attention/obsession for both domestic politics and personal popularity, produces a critique that is often as indirect (and perhaps unintentional) as it is ferocious. Kissinger was "personally insecure to the point of paranoia," (40) Schwartz writes. His published writings, "as interesting and insightful as" they "often are" "should be approached as primarily instrumental, designed less for intellectual consistency than for political utility" (35). Published in 1961, Kissinger's famous *The Necessity for Choice*⁶ – a book examining various challenges for U.S. foreign policy – was little more than "a job application" (47) in the Kennedy administration, Schwartz maintains. As scholars of Kissinger know very well, he could be brutal with his subordinates as well as remarkably superficial and binary in his analyses and policy prescription. Discussing the effects of the Arab oil boycott following the October 1973 war, Kissinger mused with nostalgia on nineteenth-century imperialism, when the United States and its allies would have intervened militarily and assumed direct control of the oil fields, and denounced as ridiculous a contemporary age when, in his words, "the civilized world is held up by 8 million savages" (246). A politician more than an intellectual, Kissinger was also "far more a tactician than a strategist, and his real skill was in his ability to react and respond to international events and trends" (407), Schwartz concludes. And despite Schwartz's admirable effort to provide readers with a full and balanced picture of Kissinger's thoughts, deeds and policies, at the end it is hard to imagine a more damning critique for someone who built his unique fame on his alleged intellectual prowess, propensity to conceptualize and look for long term structural solutions, and ability to educate the American public to the complex and impenetrable *arcana* of international relations.

⁶ Henry Kissinger, *The Necessity for Choice: Prospects of American Foreign Policy* (New York: Harper, 1961)

 REVIEW BY CAROLYN EISENBERG, HOFSTRA UNIVERSITY

For people of a certain age, it might be a surprise that few of today's college students know much, or even anything about Henry Kissinger. Decades ago, he was a foreign policy colossus, whose every word was eagerly perused by politicians and journalists alike. Moreover, in the aftermath of his official role in the Nixon and Ford administrations, he has continued to be a sought-after expert by high level policymakers and the mainstream media.

Thomas Schwartz is aware that for the young people he teaches, "Henry Kissinger is not very well known or understood." It is for them that he has written this book. His aim is "to explain who Henry Kissinger was, what he thought, what he did, and why it matters." (5)

The literature on Kissinger is already vast, including the subject's detailed memoirs,⁷ and extended list of books and articles. There are numerous studies of Kissinger's role during the period 1969-75,⁸ plus the many works on President Richard Nixon's foreign policy, which give substantial attention to his National Security Advisor and later Secretary of State.⁹

Why then another book? From the outset, Schwartz signals his dissatisfaction with the work of fellow historians, many of whom are sharply critical of Kissinger's activities. But he also disassociates himself from establishment analysts who have lionized Kissinger's activity. In his opinion, this hitherto polarized discussion "does little to provide any real understanding of the historical role he has played, or the consequences and legacy of his public life and career" (8).

The reader is therefore alerted from the outset that this will be a "middle-of-the-road" book, which will stay away from the "thundering moral pronouncements of condemnation that are commonplace among academics and political activists" (4), while avoiding excessive praise. The author's aim is to "reintroduce" Henry Kissinger as "a brilliant man who thought

⁷ Henry Kissinger, *Ending the Vietnam War: A History of America's Involvement and Extrication from the Vietnam War*. (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2003); *White House Years* (Boston: Little Brown, 1979); *Years of Upheaval* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1979).

⁸ Larry Berman, *No Peace, No Honor: Nixon, Kissinger and Betrayal in Vietnam* (New York: Free Press, 2001); Robert K. Brigham, *Reckless: Henry Kissinger and the Tragedy of Vietnam* (New York: Public Affairs 2018); Robert Dallek, *Nixon and Kissinger: Partners in Power* (New York: Harper Collins 2007); Mario del Pero, *The Eccentric Realist: Henry Kissinger and the Shaping of American Foreign Policy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2010); Greg Grandin, *Kissinger's Shadow* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2015); Jussi Hanhimäki, *The Flawed Architect: Henry Kissinger and American Foreign Policy*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004); Seymour M. Hersh, *The Price of Power: Kissinger in the Nixon White House*. (New York: Summit Books, 1983); Chris Hitchins, *The Trial of Henry Kissinger* (New York: Verso, 2001); Walter Isaacson, *Kissinger* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1972); Richard A. Moss, *Nixon's Back Channel to Moscow, Confidential Diplomacy and Détente* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2017); Jeremy Suri, *Henry Kissinger and the American Century* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007).

⁹ Pierre Asselin, *A Bitter Peace: Washington, Hanoi and the Making of the Paris Agreement* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002); Gary J. Bass, *The Blood Telegram*. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2018); William P. Bundy, *Tangled Web: the Making of Foreign Policy in the Nixon Presidency* (New York: I.B. Tauris, 1998); Jeffrey Kimball, *The Vietnam War Files Uncovering the Secret History of Nixon-Era Strategy* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2004); Raymond L. Garthoff, *Détente and Confrontation: American-Soviet Relations from Nixon to Reagan*, Rev. ed. (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 1994); Jeffrey Kimball, *Nixon's Vietnam War* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1998); Lien-Hang T. Nguyen, *Hanoi's War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012); Frederik Logevall and Andrew Preston (eds), *Nixon in the World American Foreign Relations, 1969-1977* (New York City, Oxford University Press, 2008.); Stephen Randolph, *Powerful and Brutal Weapons Nixon, Kissinger and the Easter Offensive* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007); William Shawcross, *Sideshow: Kissinger, Nixon and the Destruction of Cambodia* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1979); Asaf Siniver, *Nixon, Kissinger, and U.S. Foreign Policy Making* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

seriously, and with great insight about the foreign policy issues of the time, but who was given to deception and intrigue...” (8).

The strength of Schwartz’s book lies in its comprehensiveness and accessibility. He carefully chronicles Kissinger’s outlook and activities from the time he returned from Germany in the aftermath of World War II to the early days of the Trump administration, when he proffered his geopolitical advice. The author eschews gossip and polemics, while highlighting the rationale and significance of Kissinger’s specific policy choices. In the future, professional historians and other writers can usefully consult this volume as offering a detailed, factual framework for examining Kissinger’s evolving position.

Yet in his effort to be dispassionate, Schwartz’ diligent recitation of Kissinger’s words and actions, omits many essential tasks. With rare exceptions, he fails to provide an independent discussion of the issues at stake. If today’s students are indeed a target audience, then it would be helpful to illuminate the nature of the Vietnam War, so that they can better understand why it was controversial. Throughout the narrative, Schwartz alludes to domestic opposition to the Administration’s handling of Vietnam. He also makes it clear that this was a significant constraint on Nixon and Kissinger’s policy. But were these opponents simply a nuisance, as the two were apt to think, or did they have important insights and concerns that ought to have weighed more heavily?

Among the factors generating antiwar sentiment in the United States, and around the world, was a growing realization of the repressive, authoritarian nature of the South Vietnamese regime. Associated with its unpopularity was a demoralized and at times insubordinate South Vietnamese Army. For critics, these circumstances both undermined the moral basis of the American position and portended its eventual defeat. From this book, we learn that Kissinger was not oblivious to the vulnerability of Saigon, but this led him to resist troop withdrawals and to advocate for more violent U.S. initiatives. Unless the reader is already familiar with the arguments, however, this relevant context is missing.

The same holds true for many other issues, large and small. While the existence of alternative perspectives is acknowledged, there is not much effort to amplify them. The inevitable result is to give Kissinger the last word on most contested subjects. A case in point is the author’s discussion of the SALT negotiations. Although much of this transpired in secret, Kissinger’s high-handed interventions in those talks generated complaints from both sides of the political spectrum. Schwartz mentions the dissatisfaction without amplifying it. On the one hand, Kissinger’s flat out refusal to consider a ban on multiple independently targetable reentry vehicles (MIRVs) opened the door to one of the most de-stabilizing weapons in the nuclear field. On the other hand, his acceptance of Russian superiority in land-based and sea-launched missiles became the occasion for an angry movement by conservatives, who would later block further progress in arms control.

On the topic of arms control, perhaps the best source is Gerard Smith, chief U.S. negotiator for the Strategic Arms Limitation talks in Helsinki and Vienna, 1969- 1971. In 1985, when he wrote his book *Doubletalk*, he certainly had an ax to grind, since Kissinger had undermined his negotiations with the Russians at every step of the way.¹⁰ At the same time, there was nobody more expert on the content and character of the talks. Nevertheless, Schwartz makes slight use of his account.

Given the overwhelming primary and secondary literature, it is of course understandable that an historian might miss a particular book, or even more. What is troublesome however, is the author’s neglect of all dissenting voices. It is not simply a disgruntled arms controller or peace movement spokesman whose words are missing. Despite thousands of declassified transcripts, the reader rarely if ever sees a quote from Le Duc Tho, Senior Advisor to the North Vietnamese delegation to the Paris peace talks, Zhou Enlai, Premier of the People’s Republic of China or Leonid Brezhnev, Chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet when they interacted with Kissinger. Did these historical actors never say a worthwhile thing? For a different perspective we mainly get the ruminations of Richard Nixon.

¹⁰ Gerard Smith, *Doubletalk: The Story of SALT I by the Chief American Negotiator* (Maryland: University Press of America, 1985).

One strength of Schwartz' narrative is that the author is keenly attuned to fawning, self-promoting nature of Kissinger's relationship with the president. He demonstrates that many of Kissinger's positions were designed to advance his standing with Nixon, while reflecting poorly on less bellicose rivals within the administration. Moreover, as National Security Advisor, Kissinger zealously cultivated flocks of reporters and famous admirers, whose adulation increased his value to the chief executive, even if it sometimes provoked Nixon's jealousy.

This study contains the implication that on various occasions Kissinger departed from his own predilections for the purpose of wooing the president. The controversial case of Chile is one example. "Before September 1970 Kissinger ignored Chile and denigrated its significance." (109). But the rise of Socialist party candidate Salvador Allende is infuriating to Nixon. Thus, understanding "the President's passions, Kissinger played to them." He took charge of an administration effort to promote a coup before Allende's inauguration. And having failed in that attempt, he oversaw what became a long-term effort to destabilize the regime and promote a military overthrow.

These interventions in Chilean affairs form part of the critics' indictment of Kissinger as 'a war criminal.' And clearly, Schwartz regards them as objectionable - a case of poor judgement and excessive zeal. Yet running through his account is an undertow of rationalization. This after all is what Nixon wanted, he explains. And there were legitimate reasons for concern. Allende "had close ties to Fidel Castro and the Soviet Union" and the KGB had "spent considerably" to promote his election and subsequently remained active in the country (108). While acknowledging that the Nixon administration overreacted and behaved badly, Schwartz asserts that any suggestion "that Kissinger was the author of Allende's demise gives him too much blame - or credit" (112).

However destructive for the Chilean people, the US activities there were of peripheral concern to Kissinger. For the National Security Advisor and Nixon, the main challenge in 1972 was managing the interconnected problems of Vietnam, relations with China, and with the Soviet Union. Schwartz suggests that on these items, the two were beginning to diverge. For the president extrication from Vietnam was the main preoccupation, whereas Kissinger was thinking about the new structure of international relations, in which the 'triangular' interactions of the superpowers would hold sway. That assessment seems questionable. Based on the archival records, it is apparent that Kissinger was equally riveted to the Vietnam situation and as important his diplomacy with the Soviets and the Chinese was significantly shaped by the administration's failure in Southeast Asia.

Schwartz appropriately recognizes the achievement of the two men in improving the international atmosphere, especially in taking the long overdue step of accepting the existence of the People's Republic of China and significantly reducing tensions with the Soviet Union.

Yet he too readily accepts the Kissinger version of events. In his rendering, by skillfully playing off the rivalry of the two communist superpowers, he extracted significant concessions, including some assistance in pressuring Hanoi to make a settlement, closer to the administration's terms. A related premise is that North Vietnamese leaders had been chastened by the failure of their Easter offensive and were now eager to exit the war. These combined developments produced the 'trifecta' of accomplishments which propelled Richard Nixon into a second term of office and set a bold new pattern of international relations.

Yet this account ignores the weakness and vulnerability of the American position. By the spring of 1971, when Chinese leader Zhou Enlai extended his invitation for a U.S. emissary to visit Beijing, Nixon's policy in Vietnam was in shambles. As Schwartz notes, the South Vietnamese foray into Laos was a failure, but so too were the South's ongoing operations in Cambodia. As American troops were pulled back, the inability of the South Vietnamese military to offer effective resistance had become manifest. Meanwhile Kissinger's negotiations with the North Vietnamese were going nowhere.

As an election neared, the Presidential visits to China and the Soviet Union had become essential, if for no other reason than to change the script and reincarnate Nixon as a man of peace. Many other concerns applied, but this included a need for help with the frozen Paris negotiations. However, that assistance required American concessions to the Soviets and the

Chinese. It is an ironic turn of events that after fighting an unnecessary war for American 'credibility,' that Kissinger struck a deal on arms control that opened the door to Soviet superiority in strategic weapons, while making it clear to the Chinese that the American commitment to Taiwan would be curtailed during Nixon's second term. On top of this was the absurdity of his enlistment of Soviet and Chinese diplomats in his petty plans to marginalize the Secretary of State, William Rogers.

The Soviets and Chinese did pressure Hanoi, as Nixon and Kissinger desired. But they did so in a limited way, continuing their economic and military aid, while counseling flexibility. Nevertheless, by the fall of 1972, the North Vietnamese did change their negotiating position, abandoning their requirement that the Thieu government step down as a pre-requisite to a cease-fire. Schwartz suggests that international pressure, combined with a failed Easter offensive, induced that change.

But there is reason for skepticism about Kissinger's formulations. During the spring of 1972, the North Vietnamese military had been steadily advancing, because the ARVN (Army of the Republic of Vietnam) was unable to stop it. It was not until the massive U.S. bombing in South Vietnam that the offensive was finally halted. However, by the time the fighting had stopped, the number of North Vietnamese troops now located in the South had significantly increased, numbering an estimated 130,000-140,000.

It was against this backdrop that the North Vietnamese negotiator, Le Duc Tho, accepted the temporary continuation of the Thieu government. He did so with the clear expectation that Hanoi's troops would remain in the South and would exercise jurisdiction in those locations. At the time, and forever after, Kissinger has tried to claim Hanoi's concession as a remarkable accomplishment, but it was far less than he advertised. His subsequent complaints that this excellent peace agreement failed to work because the U.S. Congress would not honor its commitment cannot withstand scrutiny.

In his effort to write a fair-minded account of Henry Kissinger's long career, Schwartz sidesteps the human consequences of his choices. Richard Nixon was the ultimate 'decider,' but the National Security Advisor and later Secretary of State played a major role, as the author demonstrates. What then were the results of their decisions? How did their choices affect the lives of Vietnamese, Laotians, Cambodians, Chileans, and even U.S. soldiers? Describing the policy process, while paying scant attention to their effects reproduces Kissinger's personal myopia.

Indeed, from the thousands of declassified documents and tapes now available, one looks in vain for any sign of concern by Kissinger about the possible harm to other people, Americans or others. Schwartz identifies one occasion, when Kissinger worried about killing civilians, only to be rebuked by Nixon for this lapse. However, this exchange was unusual. More typical was his effort to win Nixon's approval, by his embrace of harsh policies, rejected by others in the Administration, notably Secretary of Defense Melvin Laird and Rogers.

This review focuses on the first four years of the Nixon Administration. However, the author has undertaken a more ambitious project of describing the entirety of Henry Kissinger's public career. In that regard, Schwartz has accomplished what he set out to do by clearly describing the ideas, spoken words, and actions of Kissinger across the decades. He concludes with the fair observation that this "complicated man" was truly "a symbol of America's international power." (416). But how that power has been used internationally remains the searing question.

 RESPONSE BY THOMAS A. SCHWARTZ, VANDERBILT UNIVERSITY

It is a great honor to have a roundtable of such distinguished reviewers examining my book, *Henry Kissinger and American Power: A Political Biography*. Authors can grow defensive about projects they have worked on for years, and I confess to feeling that way sometimes when I have read various reviews.¹¹ However, Susan Colbourn, Mario Del Pero, and Carolyn Eisenberg have all engaged my book in a serious and professional manner, and I am deeply grateful to them for their analysis.

I wrote *Henry Kissinger and American Power: A Political Biography* as part of a publishing series that seeks to use biography as means of teaching a broader subject, in this case the history of United States foreign relations. My goal was to use Kissinger's biography to show the degree to which foreign relations and domestic politics are intertwined within the American system, and compel readers to recognize that this connection makes for a very messy and complicated policy process. I also wrote about Henry Kissinger after becoming aware of how little my students knew about him and his important role in recent American history. Whether I succeeded in either of these objectives is something I have to leave to readers to judge.

I could not help but smile as I read the Susan Colbourn's review and thought about my editor, Alex Star, and his insistence that I cut more than 25 percent out of the manuscript I originally submitted. I told Alex that I was sure one of the first reviews would mention something that I had removed from the book, and that was the case with my treatment of Nixon and Kissinger's reaction toward the German policy of *Ostpolitik*. I cut some of what Colbourn would have liked me to cover because I had edited a volume with Matthias Schulz that examined many of these issues.¹² I cannot say the same about her comment about Kissinger and issue of the "New International Economic Order." I knew from my research in the television archive that this attracted public attention, but it did not seem to have engaged Kissinger on a personal level and I did not find very much in the documents. Kissinger's well-known distaste for economic issues played a role, but I may simply have missed it. I agree with Colbourn that this is an issue that deserves greater attention.

Colbourn also discusses Kissinger's career after he left office, something I attempted to cover in my last chapter. However, I admit that my research and conclusions here are rather tentative. As to Kissinger's commentary on transatlantic issues such as the one Colbourn mentions in 1979, I see his newspaper columns as his attempt to stay relevant, and at the time, it was still a very likely possibility he might again become Secretary of State. Kissinger's suggestion that mutually assured destruction as a matter of strategy had serious flaws is an idea that President Ronald Reagan shared, although Reagan would not have expressed it in the same way. Kissinger may well have been positioning himself to offer some alternative to a future president. I agree with Colbourn that it would be interesting to examine the background to Kissinger's expressions of these opinions and political op-eds. Yet because these personal records of Kissinger also discuss his extensive business consulting and other sensitive matters, I seriously doubt that they will become available to researchers in the near future. One of my editors suggested that there is a whole other book in Kissinger's private role in international politics and globalization over the last half-century. However, I doubt that it will be fully possible to write it for some time, even if Kissinger gives his biographer Niall Ferguson access to all of the records.

Although Mario Del Pero criticizes the narrative in the book as "a bit dry and over dense," he is quite supportive of what I see as my most important contribution to understanding Kissinger, namely an assessment of Kissinger as a political actor, a man who understood that American foreign policy was shaped and determined by American domestic politics. Del Pero,

¹¹ For example, the reviewer for the *Christian Science Monitor* reported that my book portrayed Nixon as deciding to invade Cambodia in May 1970 "while Kissinger was out of the room." This is so wrong that I have to wonder if he read the book. <https://www.csmonitor.com/Books/Book-Reviews/2020/0916/Kissinger-evokes-respect-and-vitriol-in-equal-measure>

¹² Matthias Schulz and Thomas A. Schwartz, *The Strained Alliance: U.S. – European Relations from Nixon to Carter* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

whose own outstanding work on Kissinger influenced my thinking,¹³ praises my approach as “very balanced,” and a “solid middle ground,” between the “interpretive polarity,” of condemning Kissinger as a war criminal or praising him as America’s “greatest statesman.” However at the end of what is basically a favorable review, Del Pero concludes that “it is hard to imagine a more damning critique” of Kissinger, given the image he had created of himself as the brilliant foreign policy practitioner who looked for “long term structural solutions” and sought to educate the American public in the complexity of foreign policy.

One thing that every author learns is that once your book is out there, people will read it in ways that you may not have intended. For example, one reviewer in the very conservative *Claremont Review of Books* used my book to condemn Kissinger as an appeaser of the Soviet Union during his time in office, and insisted that Kissinger might be available to negotiate another “surrender” to China if he had the opportunity.¹⁴ Del Pero’s “damning critique” comment on my treatment of Kissinger’s foreign policy seems tame compared to that, but my question is “Compared to who or what?” If anything is clear over the years since Kissinger was in office, we have seen much greater ineptitude, incompetence, and sheer stupidity in the handling of American foreign policy. Although Kissinger may not be the towering strategic thinker he portrayed himself as in his memoirs, I would still maintain that he gave foreign policy an “intelligent design” that earned the respect of other world leaders as well as a majority of the American public. One central point I wanted to convey in the book is that Kissinger did have to conduct foreign policy within the constraints of the American political system, and in recognition of a system in which domestic partisan politics and foreign policy were bound together. Within that system, he did have some success, as well as a number of failures, especially Vietnam and Chile. However, his diplomatic scorecard, especially in managing relations with the Soviet Union, opening toward China, and negotiating peace in the Middle East, does look fairly impressive when compared with that of his successors.

Carolyn Eisenberg’s review is the most critical of the book, and I recognize and respect that she comes at the book from a very different perspective from mine. Let me try to respond to as many of her points as I can. She thinks that despite my research and search for a balanced perspective on Kissinger to present to contemporary students, I fail “to provide an independent discussion of the issues at stake.” Her prime example is Vietnam, with the argument that I do not make it clear that the United States was wrong to support the “repressive, authoritarian” South Vietnamese regime. Again, I might say, compared to what? The “people’s democracy” of North Vietnam, from which more than three million Vietnamese would desperately flee after the conquest of Saigon? I would readily concede that South Vietnam proved a failed state, but in its fragmented and divided political system, it was far more open, pluralistic, and free than the totalitarian and communist dictatorship of North Vietnam.¹⁵ I make it clear in the book how irritated Kissinger could be with the stubborn defiance of Saigon’s leaders, who were anything but puppets of the Americans. Thankfully, the work of a new generation of scholars is expanding our understanding of the Vietnamese civil war, and while American intervention was a historic mistake, the “human consequences,” which Eisenberg references, were far more morally complicated than she suggests.¹⁶

¹³ Mario Del Pero, *The Eccentric Realist: Henry Kissinger and the Shaping of American Foreign Policy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2010).

¹⁴ David P. Goldman, “Indecent Interval,” *Claremont Review of Books* (Fall 2020)
<https://claremontreviewofbooks.com/indecent-interval/>

¹⁵ On this point, I encourage scholars to read the work of younger scholars such as Sean Fear, who teaches at the University of Leeds, and David Prentice at Oklahoma State University. Fear has written a number of telling articles in the “Vietnam 67” series which the *New York Times* ran in 2017 and 2018. His “How South Vietnam Defeated Itself,” February 23, 2018, was particularly insightful.
<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/02/23/opinion/how-south-vietnam-defeated-itself.html>

¹⁶ I am influenced here by Christopher Goscha, *Vietnam: A New History* (New York: Basic Books, 2016).

Eisenberg faults me for not using Gerald Smith's book on SALT more extensively to criticize Kissinger's conduct of the negotiations.¹⁷ While I agree that Smith's work is illuminating on the details of the talks, my argument was that the domestic political imperative of an arms control agreement was what was paramount for Nixon and Kissinger. Nixon wanted Kissinger to take personal control over the negotiations in order to make sure that the credit for a successful agreement went to Nixon, and not to State Department diplomats. This approach led Kissinger to make mistakes and accept some compromises, such as Russian superiority in land-based and sea-based missiles, that would later cause him political problems. However, on this particular issue, I confess to a certain sympathy for Kissinger's exasperated plea, "What in the name of God is strategic superiority when you are at this level of warheads?" (266). This statement got Kissinger into trouble with hawkish politicians in Washington, but it had the unusual quality for Kissinger of being true.

Eisenberg is also critical of the lack of quotations from Kissinger's adversaries, figures like North Vietnamese negotiator Le Duc Tho, Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev, or Zhou Enlai, the Chinese Premier. I find it puzzling that she refers to these figures as "dissenting voices," an unusual euphemism for the leaders of enemy states. I do actually have quotations from all of them in the book, although much of the Brezhnev material is in the chapters dealing with Nixon-Ford period from 1973-1976, which Eisenberg does not address in her review. Some of the other quotations were victims of the editing process I mentioned earlier, but I seriously doubt that more ideological *bon mots* from these Communist leaders would have added very much to the narrative.

I think that Eisenberg reads me correctly on Chile, although I reject her claim that mentioning Chilean President Salvador Allende's ties to Castro and the Soviet Union makes for "an undertow of rationalization." Although I argue that Nixon and Kissinger overreacted to the threat, they were not delusional about Allende's political leanings. The intervention in Chile was one of the worst mistakes of the Nixon-Kissinger foreign policy, but my judgment is that it exaggerates American power to think that the United States policy caused the overthrow of the Allende government.

Eisenberg challenges my discussion of the "divergence" between Nixon and Kissinger in early 1972, a divergence she thinks is "questionable" on the issue of Vietnam. In my view, the documents and tapes do show that Nixon and Kissinger did disagree on the importance of Vietnam as opposed to the Moscow summit in the spring of 1972. Nixon believed it was imperative for him to preserve South Vietnam for his domestic political viability, whereas Kissinger thought the Moscow summit and an arms control agreement were more important objectives for the Administration. I use this as an example of how domestic politics shaped foreign policy during this period, and to show the degree to which Kissinger did not always fully comprehend Nixon's political concerns.

Eisenberg's description of Kissinger's flawed peace agreement of 1973 is not one with which I would fundamentally disagree, although I think she assumes the North Vietnamese leadership was as pleased with it and confident of success that in hindsight they should have been. In fact, both Pierre Asselin and Lien-Hang Nguyen's work suggests that accepting the peace settlement was a bitter pill for Le Duan and the Communist leadership, who had gambled on the Easter Offensive and taken huge casualties.¹⁸ The willingness of the North Vietnamese government to sacrifice an extraordinary number of their own people in pursuit of forced reunification under Communist rule reflects their own domestic imperatives, and perhaps one day will be debated in a more democratic and pluralist Vietnam.

¹⁷ Gerard Smith, *Doubletalk: The Story of SALT I by the Chief American Negotiator* (Maryland: University Press of America, 1985).

¹⁸ Pierre Asselin, *Vietnam's American War: A History* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2018) and Lien-Hang T. Nguyen, *Hanoi's War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012).

Jussi Hanhimäki, whose book on Kissinger first inspired me to approach the subject, observes that my book is “unlikely to remain, for very long, the last word on the subject.”¹⁹ He is right, of course, but his observation also reflects the significance of the issues and events that Henry Kissinger is connected with, and his importance as both a practitioner and symbol of American power in the twentieth century.

¹⁹ Jussi Hanhimäki, *The Flawed Architect: Henry Kissinger and American Foreign Policy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004).