Henry Kissinger's Contribution to the Conception of International Relations Legitimacy, Consensus and Order: the Foreign Policy of Moderation

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t is a rare opportunity for an individual to both philosophize about and participate in the changing course of international relations. Henry Kissinger had the unique experience of commenting on American foreign policy through his various published works and directly participating in its formation as both former Secretary of State and head of the National Security Council. His early life in Germany, his Army career and Harvard education were contributing factors to his successful political career serving three consecutive American presidents in a variety of ways. Henry Kissinger's adherence to the Realist tradition is evident through examination of his various works on American foreign policy. He greatly contributed to the field of International Relations through his writings but this essay seeks to emphasize the concepts of legitimacy, consensus and order as expressed in American Foreign Policy and Nuclear Weapons and Foreign Policy. Finally, this essay seeks to demonstrate the applicability of Kissinger's concepts of legitimacy, consensus and order to international relations with particular attention to the relationship between the United States and the Soviet Union during the Cold War.

The context: Henry Kissinger's Life and Career

Heinz Alfred Kissinger was born on May 27, 1923 to Paula Stern and Louis Kissinger. The Kissingers were members of the small Orthodox Jewish community in Fürth, Germany ¹. Louis Kissinger was a well-paid secondary school teacher, while Paula stayed at home, in charge of household duties. The Kissingers lived within this stable environment until Nazi rule made its impact in Fürth. Most Fürth Jews served in the German army (despite exposure to anti-Semitism) during World War 1 and the majority considered themselves as much German as Jewish. Some Fürth Jews considered themselves German nationalists, at least until 1936; six years after the Nazis came to power². Jews who worked for German companies were dismissed without explanation and were forced to find work elsewhere. Louis Kissinger never came into direct contact with the Nazis, but Hitler's rise to power had an immediate effect on his teaching career. When the Weimar Republic dissolved all private schools, Louis was laid off, but he quickly found another teaching position. When the Nazi party prohibited all Jews from public positions in 1933, Louis was forced to teach at a Jewish vocational school³. In 1935, when the Nuremberg Law were declared, the German citizenship of Jews was revoked, and Jewish children were expelled from public schools. Louis Kissinger was fired from his teaching position once again in 1936.

In 1938, Paula Kissinger realized that the family's fate was unsure if they stayed in Fürth while Germany was under Nazi rule. The Kissinger family fled to England in 1938 and obtained the necessary documents for immigration to the United States⁴. They settled in Fort Washington, New York amongst a close community of Jews who had also fled from Hitler's regime⁵. Henry Kissinger has been quoted as saying that the Nazis' rise to power in Germany made no significant or traumatizing impact on his childhood and character⁶. Although attempts at historiography must be avoided as much as possible, one must consider the negative impression left on Henry as he watched his father's secure teaching career crumble through no fault of his own, and the decline in family income as a result. In

Fort Washington, Louis Kissinger worked as a bookkeeper, while Paula contributed to the family income by catering. Henry was fifteen years old at this time and attended Fort Washington High School. He performed well, distinguishing himself in mathematics. The last two years of his high school, Henry enrolled in night school, in order to work at a shaving brush factory and help the family finances. After he had graduated in June 1941, Henry enrolled in City College of New York with the hopes of becoming an accountant⁷. A draft notice in January 1943 would shift Henry's aspirations in another direction.

Henry Kissinger was nineteen years old when he completed his basic training component at Camp Croft in South Carolina. The army's IQ and aptitude tests qualified Henry for the Army Specialized Training Program, an engineering program that sent selected soldiers to Lafayette College at the government's expense. However, the army cancelled the program and in April 1944, Henry Kissinger was reassigned to the 84th Infantry Division at Camp Claiborne, Louisiana as a foot soldier. In November, the company was sent to Aachen, Germany. Henry Kissinger was reassigned as a driver-interpreter for the commanding general of the Intelligence Division. Kissinger impressed many army officials with his intelligence, stamina and organizational skills⁸. In June 1945, he was promoted to sergeant and when the 84th moved eastward across Germany, Kissinger was promoted as a Counter-Intelligence agent. When demobilization occurred in 1946, he remained in Germany as a civilian instructor at the European Command Intelligence School in Oberammergau. He taught Germany history to army personnel who outranked him in age, position and expertise. Kissinger was respected among his army comrades as a soldier, and now he also garnered admiration for his instructional capabilities⁹.

In the spring of 1947, Henry Kissinger returned to the United States to enroll in college once more. He was twenty-four years old when he was accepted at Harvard University. His impact as undergraduate student, a graduate student and a faculty member of Harvard would last twenty years. Henry Kissinger majored in Government and graduated Summa Cum Laude in 1950. Endowed with scholarships, Henry Kissinger received his Master's degree in Government in 1952 and received his Ph.D. in 1954. During his graduate studies, Kissinger directed the Harvard International Seminar. The seminar report described its purpose as being "for persons between the ages of 26 and 45 who are on the verge of reaching positions of leadership in their own countries." It was here that Henry Kissinger established numerous contacts with foreign officials, with whom he would interact in the future. When Harvard University did not grant Henry Kissinger a tenure-line assistant professor promotion (from instructor), he left for New York and the Council of Foreign Relations. The purpose of the Council was to discuss nuclear weapons and foreign policy. In March 1955, the Council appointed Henry Kissinger as the rapporteur. In 1957, from the various reports he made while being a part of the Council, Kissinger wrote his bestseller Nuclear Weapons and Foreign Policy, and was awarded the Woodrow Wilson Prize for his work¹¹. During the summer of the same year, Henry Kissinger returned to Harvard and was appointed as a lecturer in the government department. He was promoted to associate professor in 1959 and then to full professor, with tenure in 1962. He was the director of the Defense Studies Programme from 1959 to 1969. Between 1955 and 1968, Henry Kissinger served as a consultant on security issues to various U.S. agencies under the administrations of Dwight D. Eisenhower, John F. Kennedy and Lyndon B. Johnson¹².

In December 1968, President Nixon appointed Henry Kissinger assistant for national security affairs. Kissinger was also head of the National Security Council from 1969 to

1975 and acted as Secretary of State from September 1973 to January 1977. Amongst his major diplomatic achievements were negotiations with the Soviet Union, Vietnam, China and the Middle East¹³. His policy of détente with the Soviet Union led to the Strategic Arms Limitation Talks (SALT) in 1969. In 1972, he became the first U.S. official to make contact with the People's Republic of China since Chairman Mao Tse-Tung came to power¹⁴. Henry Kissinger played a prominent role concerning the relations between Vietnam and the United States. He was involved in the formulation of President Nixon's Vietnamization policy, which outlined the disengagement of U.S. troops from South Vietnam and their replacement by South Vietnamese forces. On January 23, 1973, he initialed the Agreement on Ending the War and Restoring Peace in Vietnam. For their parts in resolving conflict in Vietnam, Henry Kissinger and Le Duc Tho, the North Vietnamese negotiator, were both awarded the 1973 Nobel Peace Prize¹⁵. Henry Kissinger also developed the practice of "shuttle diplomacy" during the Arab-Israeli war of 1973 to disengage the opposing armies and propose a truce amongst warring factions¹⁶. He was also responsible for the resumption of diplomatic relations between the United States and Egypt, which had been severed since 1967. When President Nixon resigned in 1974, he remained in office and continued to conduct foreign affairs under President Ford. Henry Kissinger left the White House staff in 1977 to become an international consultant, writer His numerous publications include A World Restored; Metternich. and lecturer. Castlereagh, and the Problems of Peace (1957)), The Necessity for Choice: prospects of American Foreign Policy (1961), The troubled partnership: a re-appraisal of the Atlantic Alliance (1965), American Foreign Policy (1969), The White House Years (1979) and For the Record (1981).

Henry Kissinger: Carrying on the Realist Tradition

Through the analysis of his various publications, one can conclude that Henry Kissinger adheres to the Realist paradigm. Before demonstrating how Kissinger follows the Realist tradition, this essay considers it necessary first to define Realism. The Realist paradigm seeks to answer some pertinent questions with respect to international relations: What are the causes of conflict and war among nations, and what are the conditions for cooperation and peace among them?¹⁷ An answer to this question may be found through analysis of how actors within a system go about securing or allocating available resources. Realism explores this concept through its analysis of the types of actors, the structure of the system and the mode of interaction between actors in international relations. The Realist perspective considers the nation-state to be the main political actor of international relations. With this idea in mind, Realism considers the collective effort of a group to be pertinent with respect to the allocation of resources. The state is a rational actor, meaning it is goal-oriented and establishes a hierarchy of goals. The state is flexible; it takes into account its own mistakes and the mistakes of others when devising strategy. The state is an autonomous actor relative to domestic pressures from lobby groups and special organizations. It has the ability to consider its collective objectives, or in political terms, its national interest. Finally, Realism considers the state to be a unitary actor. It coordinates all aspects of government and administration so that the end product is a coherent, harmonious policy. The type of system within which nation-states coexist determines their mode of interaction. For Realists, states coexist in anarchy, which is defined as the absence of a legitimate, reliable central authority that can offer protection and compensation for grievances¹⁸. The anarchical system of international relations carries three consequences; states' preference for freedom, suspicion and fear of other states and the states' nature as

self-help agents. Also, states want to possess power relative to the power of other states, making them positional actors. Therefore, nation-states place emphasis on security maximization as opposed to power maximization in their defensive approach. Most importantly, Realism contributes the concept of the balance of powers. Realists will argue that states engage in balancing behavior, which means that if one state threatens other states with its growth in power, the other states will seek methods to offset the growth of power of this one state. States will not usually engage in "band-wagoning" behavior, more precisely, weaker states will not rush to join more powerful states because they prefer freedom and autonomy from a hegemonic power¹⁹.

Comparing these tenets of Realism with Henry Kissinger's thought, we will realize that Henry Kissinger was a Realist because of his views concerning international relations, as documented in his various works. Kissinger understood that nation-states were the primary actors that influenced the course of international relations. Perhaps the term 'state' can be further defined in order to clarify its usage within the context of this essay. 'State' can be defined as a specific territory with a population that is governed by a sovereign and his administration. The term 'state' also includes the resources that the sovereign controls. including military capacity and other forms of coercive power. In his works, Kissinger frequently referred to the relations between states, not the specific relations between two governments. In the case of the Soviet Union during the Cold War, when Kissinger spoke of this state entity, he was referring to the collective efforts of the Kremlin's political unit and the military forces it controlled. By extension, the United States was more than the presidential administration or the geographical territory itself. Inherent within the encompassing term of the U.S., Kissinger also included the Army, the Navy, the Airforce and other U.S. special agencies and academia. Therefore, when Henry Kissinger underlines the relations amongst states, he is following the Realist tradition in that he recognizes the unitary quality of the state and that this collective entity exerts the greatest impact on international relations. As a Realist, Kissinger placed great emphasis on national security. He explored the national security of the United States through his various publications, such as Nuclear Weapons and Foreign Policy, in which he discusses the limitation of allout nuclear war as the only American foreign policy option during the Cold War. His various positions with U.S. special agencies all concerned the topic of national security and the fact that he was an outside consultant to various presidential administrations demonstrates that he was considered one of the most highly educated persons on national defense issues. What must be underlined concerning Kissinger and his views on national security is that he has always had a defensive approach concerning the use of coercive power. He did not advise using force offensively, particularly during the Cold War era when 'mutually assured destruction' loomed over the relations between the U.S. and the Soviet Union. He took the position of exploring several options for easing tensions between states, including diplomacy, but also stated that in the anarchical system of international relations, a state must be willing to follow through with its threat of using coercive power²⁰. Finally, Kissinger adhered to the Realist concept of balance of powers. He did not want the U.S. to be a hegemonic power that imposed its "American" solutions to international problems. He stated that the U.S. could no longer act as a paternalistic state that felt it had to intervene in all international issues²¹. To assert itself as the ultimate power threatened the security of other states, and such behavior would incite hostility. Hostility in the era of "mutually assured destruction" was a lethal affair. Kissinger implied through his various works that the USA faced a major problem, which could endanger its very existence: the reluctance to acknowledge the legitimacy of other states, particularly the

Soviet Union and China, two formidable powers in their own right. In a system where states are competing for the same resources, conflict is inevitable and is a more common form of interaction than peace. Kissinger understood this concept, and embarked upon proposing strategies that presented the USA as a formidable power that would use force only if explicitly provoked. At the same time, the USA needed to respect the legitimacy of other states and therefore not inciting other states into using aggression because they feared a threat to their national security.

Henry Kissinger's Main Concepts and their Applicability to International Relations

Henry Kissinger shared numerous important concepts of the realist tradition of International Relations, but this essay has chosen to outline three of his ideas that are particularly pervasive in their scope. The concepts of legitimacy, consensus and order are. for Henry Kissinger, the basis for progressive international relations amongst states. He expressed his thoughts that one of the reasons why relations between states were often strained was because these three concepts were not being respected or given precedence. He does not pretend that paying closer attention to the concepts of legitimacy, consensus and order will always result in peaceful international relations, rather he believes that understanding and following these concepts lead to more productive modes of interaction. As former Security of State and Head of the National Security Council, Henry Kissinger directly experienced the impact of U.S. foreign policies on relations between the USA and other nations, and as a result, he had the opportunity to comment and propose changes. Above all, however, Kissinger stressed that moderation and flexibility should guide all international relations because a state's foreign policy that remained static with respect to the changing course of history would be ineffective and could even cause unnecessary antagonism between states. Flexibility was an extremely important concept when applied to the recognition of the legitimacy of a state; for more productive modes of international relations, nations had to respect, and therefore legitimize each other's different concerns and goals.

Legitimacy is defined as the implication of the existence of right²². In the context of international relations, a legitimate state is regarded by other states within the system as being a contender for resources, and that grievances this state has with other states are to be taken seriously and resolved through the use of diplomacy. Legitimacy implies that other foreign state officials recognize a sovereign's authority within the state in question. Legitimacy is the basis of productive relations between states. Legitimacy as an important concept can be demonstrated through an analysis of Henry Kissinger's thoughts concerning revolutionary leadership. He states that the revolutionary leader (as an archetype) is more interested in constructing the future of a new nation than manipulating the existing environment²³. A revolutionary leader is rarely motivated by material considerations, contrary to the illusion the West still has about the reasons for a new nation to revolt against its current government. According to Kissinger, this difference in perspective concerning the definition of revolution makes difficult the dialogue between the West and the leaders of new countries. The West adheres to the notion that increased attention to economics, in other words finding methods of increasing gross national product, is the most fruitful way of establishing a new nation as a legitimate state. However, economics is too narrow a scope for a leader's ambitions²⁴. Many historical revolutions that have made an impact have operated through the introduction of a new doctrine that seeks to change the mode of thinking of a people, and an increase in economic activity is the result of such a change. The use of Communism in China and Cuba is an example of doctrinal revolution. So, for revolutionary leaders, the emphasis is placed on unifying a people behind a new type of doctrine, which serves as a basis for all modes of interaction and activity. Legitimacy is important for a successful revolution because a new country must be viewed by other legitimate states as a veritable contender in international relations. The new revolutionary government must be considered an established authority, requests and grievances have to be taken seriously by other states.

The relationship between the Soviet Union and the United States demonstrates that the concept of legitimacy is pertinent to international relations. The Soviet Union was viewed as a formidable threat to the world system that existed after World War II because it possessed nuclear arsenal equal to and sometimes exceeding that of the United States. Therefore, her actions were watched very closely and taken seriously by the United States. Adhering to Realism's concept of balance of power, the United States sought ways of offsetting Soviet power, notably in the field of nuclear weapons production, an action amongst many that provoked the nuclear arms race between these two states. However, to define the Cold War as primarily an arms race is to diminish its historical significance. According to the thoughts of Kissinger, as expressed in Nuclear Weapons and Foreign Policy, the Cold War was as much about U.S. fear of the Soviet Union's nuclear arms stockpile as it was about the bitter rivalry of doctrine. The U.S. had a limited concept of legitimacy as applied to the Soviet Union, which caused antagonism between the two countries. The actions of the U.S. demonstrated that it considered the Soviet Union legitimate because of the threat it possessed with its nuclear weapons, but it did not respect the communist doctrine the Soviet Union adhered to. Therefore, the United States concept of Soviet legitimacy was limited and its derision for the Soviet communist doctrine was, at times, more a bone of contention between the two states than nuclear arms possession. The relationship between the United States and the Soviet Union during this time in history demonstrates that the concept of legitimacy ultimately rested on consensus. The ability of nations to agree on what constituted legitimacy was a primary step, and from that point, agreement could be made towards negotiations, in which the requests and goals of each nation involved were explicitly outlined, understood and agreed to by the other respective nations.

Henry Kissinger stressed that consensus was needed for progressive international relations. Consensus can be defined as a general agreement, unanimity of opinion, the judgement arrived at by most of those concerned, group solidarity in sentiment and belief ("consensus"). Consensus of ideas and concepts needs to be established before interaction amongst states can result in anything concrete such as an agreement in the form of a treaty. Consensus also relates to the concept of legitimacy; there must be agreement amongst states concerning what are the elements that deem a state legitimate and what components must be satisfied for the recognition of established authority. Henry Kissinger states that during stable international relations, state actors recognize the "rules of the game". Adding to that statement, he goes on to say that when states have similar notions of what is just, an agreement follows concerning permissible aims and methods of foreign policy²⁵. This consensus concerning the structure of interaction opens up the opportunity for meaningful dialogue. However, when states disagree about the fundamental concept of what is just, international relations becomes more complex. When one or more states claims universal applicability of their particular structure, the structures themselves become the problem. Disagreeing about the system leads to the inability to even defining what the source of conflict is. Hence, state officials can meet, discuss and negotiate but without a consensus of what the conflict is, these meetings are futile. Concrete and progressive relations between states cannot arise unless both states are in agreement about the legitimacy of the system and the conflict in question.

The need for consensus in international relations can be demonstrated again through the relations between the Soviet Union and the United States during the Cold War. This antagonistic relationship deadlocked because, amongst many factors, of the inability of both states to agree on critical issues, such as what constituted an unambiguous threat, legitimate actions that were to be taken against this threat and most crucially, the objective of negotiations. For Henry Kissinger the inability of the United States to accurately read the intent of the Soviet Union hindered an even basic understanding of the motives behind its actions. The United States itself was unsure of what it considered an unambiguous threat, so it could not even begin to understand what element of the Soviet Union's foreign policy constituted an unambiguous threat. By extension, because there was no consensus between these two states concerning what was an unambiguous threat, they could not therefore agree what were legitimate actions that could be taken against this threat. Motions towards negotiation to end the Cold War were fruitless, because both sides had different interpretations of what the purpose of negotiation was. According to Kissinger, the United States viewed the agreement to negotiate as a success in itself, the actual process of negotiation was considered a separate endeavor. The Soviet Union, on the other hand, used negotiation as a tool to advance their version of Communism. The strained relationship between the U.S. and the Soviet Union during the Cold War is a prime example for Kissinger to assert that consensus is a critical component of productive international relations. Consensus, combined with the concept of legitimacy can lead to a world system in which nations can interact with the reassurance that stability and order exists to regulate state behavior.

Order is the third important concept emphasized by Kissinger in the conduct of international relations. Order, in the context of international relations is defined as a regular or harmonious arrangement, the state of peace, freedom from confused or unruly behaviour, and respect for law or proper authority. Kissinger as a Realist sought strategies for conditions of peace and co-operation amongst states. Order, peaceful world order, is the ideal that international relations should pursue. Legitimacy and consensus are two important elements required if order is to occur. For order to exist within the anarchical system of international relations, Kissinger believes that domestic and foreign policies of states must change in accordance with history. Modes of interaction that remain static are ineffective and even potentially dangerous for states. Kissinger cites that the way the United States conducts itself in international relations must change if it wishes to continue being a powerful entity. He believes that the U.S. can no longer adopt its paternalistic attitude of intervening in every international issue; its resources (capital, military and manpower, etc.) will be exhausted as a result. Henry Kissinger stressed that the advent of nuclear weapons required states to change their foreign policy. Conventional warfare was no longer an effective defense strategy, especially when other states possessed and were willing to use nuclear weapons. In the case of the United States, however, Kissinger argued that a foreign policy of using the all-out nuclear war strategy as the only option was far too limited and did not comply with the tradition of striving for peaceful order as much as possible. Kissinger argued for an American foreign policy that provided the U.S. president with as many options as possible to combat threats to national security. His overhaul of the

National Security Council by hiring international relations academics, former and current military officials to research and collaborate, in order to create as many feasible strategies as possible, is a concrete example of his concern for a more expansive foreign policy²⁶.

Henry Kissinger's emphasis on order is also demonstrated by his views on diplomatic negotiations between states. He has stressed that the opportunity for negotiation must always be kept open, especially in the event of war. The purpose of diplomacy was to further peaceful and progressive international relations amongst states. concerning diplomacy is especially pertinent considering the numerous diplomatic missions he undertook on behalf of the United States, notably to the People's Republic of China, the Middle East and Egypt. His own personal style of diplomacy has been the subject of many texts and he has also commented on it in his own publications. Kissinger commented that in negotiations, if every statement became a matter of survival, the important issue of resolving conflict would never be penetrated²⁷. His own style of diplomacy was to create an affable environment in which foreign officials, who were often at odds with each other, could sit down and begin to make progressive motions to meet each other half-way, with respect to their individual demands. He advised against using diplomacy as a tool to either punish or reward an opponent, rather he continually stressed that one of the most important purposes of foreign policy was to aid in creating world order, which could only be done through continual, productive diplomacy.

This essay has sought to demonstrate the contribution of Henry Kissinger to international relations, through both his writing and his direct involvement in American foreign policy. His early life, army career and association with Harvard University as both student and professor lend insight to the beginning of his prolific and provocative political career. Kissinger's adherence to Realism has allowed him to develop critical insights and make recommendations concerning American foreign policy and the role of the United States as a world actor. His involvement both directly and indirectly with various U.S. agencies and three consecutive presidential administrations has allowed him to participate in the making of history during a time when the threat of nuclear destruction constantly loomed overhead. This essay has concentrated primarily on relations between the United States and the Soviet Union during the Cold War as an example of Kissinger's emphasis on the concepts of legitimacy, consensus and order in international relations. The full impact of Henry Kissinger in the field of international relations is beyond the scope and length of this particular essay, but he may well have contributed much more to history than just his participation during the Cold War. International relations has greatly benefited from his insights and experience both as a scholar and political figure. It is evident, as many nations continue to strive towards peaceful and progressive mutual relations, that the concepts he emphasized, legitimacy, consensus, order, and moderation, are still relevant and basic to the international relations of today.

Notes

¹ Mazlish, Bruce. Kissinger: The European Mind in American Policy. New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1976. page 22.

² Ibid.

³ Starr, Harvey. Henry Kissinger: Perceptions of International Politics. Kentucky: The University Press of Kentucky, 1984, page 18.

- ⁴ Ibid.
- Mazlish. Kissinger: The European Mind op. cit. page 28.
- ⁶ Ibid. page 19.
- ⁷ Starr. Henry Kissinger op. cit. page 19.
- ⁸ Ibid., page 21.
- 9 Ibid. page 22.
- ¹⁰ Ibidt. page 23.
- 11 Ibid. page 25.
- 12 "Kissinger, Henry A." The New Encyclopaedia Britannica. 15th ed. 1987.
- 13 ibid
- 14 ibid
- 15 ibid
- 16 ibid
- ¹⁷ Doyle, Michael W., and G. John Ikenberry. New Thinking in International Relations Theory. Colorado: Westview Press, 1997. page 163.
- ¹⁸ Ibid. page 166.
- ¹⁹ Ibid. page 170.
- ²⁰ Kissinger, Henry A. American Foreign Policy. Toronto: George J. McLeod Limited, 1974. page 59.

²¹ Ibid. page 66.

- Viotti, Paul R., and Mark V. Kauppi. International Relations Theory: Realism, Pluralism, Globalism, and Beyond. Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1999. page 484.
- ²³ Kissinger. American Foreign Policy op. cit. page 39.
- ²⁴ Ibid. page 40.
- ²⁵ Ibid. page 11.
- ²⁶ Kalb, Marvin and Bernard Kalb. Kissinger. Toronto: Little, Brown and Company, Ltd., 1974. page 81.

²⁷ Kissinger, American Foreign Policy op. cit. page 57.

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