

The Path to the Unexpected Partnership of Nixon and Kissinger in 1969¹

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Introduction

Richard Nixon's triumph in the presidential elections in the autumn of 1968 opened a new era in the sphere of U.S. foreign policy formation. The newly-elected president took office with a clear idea of what role the United States should play in the world and what institutions should participate the most in achieving the goal. This vision manifested itself soon after Nixon's election when he started taking his initial steps towards efforts to shift powers concerning major foreign policy decisions from the U.S. Department of State to the White House.

Within the plan, the National Security Council² was to become the principal executive body of U.S. diplomacy. The main reason for such a decision was that the actual power of its members was more dependent on how the President himself interpreted them; in contrast, the U.S. Department of State could act as a more autonomous body when creating its policy. To make his visions come true, Nixon needed to improve the NCS's credit and extend its authority. The selection of the new National Security Advisor,³ who would lead the council, therefore became one of the main tasks to perform shortly after his election.⁴

Nixon's idea of new opportunities to establish U.S. foreign policy unequivocally contributed to enhancing the council's prestige. This led to the supposition that the President would try to appoint a highly regarded politician with long-term experience in the highest government offices or a person from Nixon's close colleagues whom he could fully trust to lead the office. Because of the new President's broad ambitions to create his own foreign policy, the

¹ This paper is the result of a project of specific research *US Secretary of State Henry Kissinger and his NATO Policy in his First Year in Office (1973–1974)* supported by the Faculty of Arts of the University of Hradec Králové in 2021.

² Hereinafter NSC (National Security Council).

³ Hereinafter NSA (National Security Advisor).

⁴ According to Nixon, NSC should provide "a focus at the highest level of government for full and frank discussions of national security issues." "National Security Memoranda," accessed 2 July 2022, <https://www.nixonlibrary.gov/national-security-memoranda>.

selection criterion was not limited only to the candidate's expertise but also to his supposed absolute future loyalty.

Given such requirements, it came as a complete surprise to many people that the President-Elect decided to offer the position to Henry Kissinger. The Harvard professor, who used to work as an advisor and diplomat in democratic administrations under the presidency of Kennedy and Johnson, and, simultaneously, an advisor to a lifelong enemy of Nixon within the Grand Old Party,⁵ Nelson Rockefeller, met neither of the requirements.⁶ Kissinger also considered himself a representative of the "mainstream of those who had either been hostile to Nixon or disdained him", which made his appointment even more confusing.⁷

This study therefore has two main goals that derive directly from that surprising appointment. The first one is an analysis of the reasons that made Richard Nixon have his colleagues called to the New York Museum at the end of November 1968, where Kissinger could be found at that time, and offer him a significant position in the newly-developing administration. Kissinger, being somewhat shocked, accepted the offer to work for the NSC. The second aim of the paper is to analyse under what conditions Nixon's administration came to office and what attitudes both the protagonists had towards the U.S. role in the world. The study is based on two assumptions: 1. Kissinger's appointment to lead the NSC and the men's views on foreign policy at that moment were linked with their rich experience in high political and academic positions 2. Nixon and Kissinger's attitudes reflected long-term trends in their thinking and, at the same time, reacted to the geopolitical circumstances associated with the ongoing Cold War.

In relation to the stated objectives, the study is based on research of several different types of archival materials. These materials include records of U.S. government meetings released by the U.S. State Department, recordings of the interviews that show the views of the observed protagonists, or Kissinger's personal papers released by the Yale University Library. For a proper understanding of how both politicians were perceived by society at that time, the

⁵ Hereinafter also GOP (Grand Old Party).

⁶ Later in his autobiography, Kissinger remembered how Nixon's offer surprised him. He admitted there were two main obstacles to his potential appointment. His "unpromising background" – being part of Kennedy's administration and the fact that until then, he "did not know the president elect". Henry Kissinger, *Roky v Bílém domě*, trans. Václav Viták (Prague: BB/art, 2006), 18. He spoke about his attitude towards Nixon as "ambivalent...Compounded of aloofness and respect, of distrust and admiration." Henry Kissinger, *Bouřlivé roky*, trans. Václav Viták (Prague: BB/art, 2004), 103.

⁷ Kissinger, *Roky v Bílém domě*, 28.

paper is based on an archive of political newspaper articles published primarily in the period either shortly before Nixon's inauguration or in the early months of his presidency. The articles were deliberately chosen to include prominent authors who often published in the most influential newspapers or journals.⁸

In the field of secondary literature, the study is derived from the works of political scientists or other academics from the period of Nixon's presidency, as well as from the books that were written several years later and are thus mainly the work of historians. In both cases, the study is based on contributions by the most prominent authors and experts on American politics as well as issues related to the Cold War and US-Soviet relations. Among them is Niall Ferguson, author of the authorised biography of Kissinger,⁹ or some of the most prominent journalists of the 1970s, for example, the Kalb brothers, whose reputations brought them into direct contact with Nixon and Kissinger as their policies were being implemented.¹⁰ The work also draws from the memoirs of the objects of the analysis themselves, namely Nixon¹¹ and Kissinger.¹² These

⁸ Among these authors may be mentioned Joseph Kraft, New York Times columnist and speech-writer for President Kennedy, James Reston who was one of the most respected columnists in the United States and long-time editor of the New York Times, and Theodor Shabad, a recognized expert on U.S.-Soviet relations and recipient of an award from the Association of American Geographers for his contributions to the field.

⁹ See Niall Ferguson, *Kissinger: 1923–1968: the Idealist* (London: Allen Lane, an imprint of Penguin Books, 2015).

¹⁰ Marvin Kalb worked as chief diplomatic correspondent for NBC News and is the recipient of six Overseas Press Club awards. His brother Bernard served as a political commentator and television correspondent, accompanying President Nixon on his historic trip to China in 1972. Robert Dallek described their book on Kissinger, more than 30 years later, as a “well-regarded biography”. Robert Dallek, *Nixon and Kissinger: Partners in Power* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2007), 614. Another example of a book from which the paper derives from is the book *The Diplomacy of Detente: the Kissinger Era* by Coral Bell. Bell was one of the most important figures in the field of international relations in the 1970s, when Nixon was in power. After her death, Henry Kissinger himself declared that “no other commentator had been as perceptive on United States policies” as her. See “Coral Bell: The ‘Accidental Academic’ Who Wanted to Stop Armageddon,” ABC, accessed 10 July 2022, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2021-07-31/coral-bell-the-accidental-academic-wanted-stop-armageddon/100334542>).

¹¹ See Richard M Nixon, *The Memoirs of Richard Nixon* (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1978).

¹² See Kissinger, *Roky v Bílém domě*; Idem, *Bouřlivé roky* or Winston Lord, *Kissinger on Kissinger: Reflections on Diplomacy, Grand Strategy, and Leadership* (New York: All Points Books, 2019). The potential bias in favour of Kissinger's policies needs to be taken into account especially in the latter book. In this book, the foreign policy of the Nixon administration is discussed, nearly fifty years later, by two figures who co-created that policy – Henry Kissinger and his advisor Winston Lord. The approach of both authors can be reflected in their descriptions of their dealings with the Chinese when they claim that: “The outcome met the classic precondition for a successful negotiation — victory for both sides.” Lord, *Kissinger*, 40.

memoirs are, of course, the most complicated part of the sources and need to be approached critically. Despite the possible intentional distortions in these sources, it is important to include them in this study because they reflect the perception of the events from the leaders themselves.

Nixon and Kissinger before 1969

To explain the politicians' later mutual relationship and their political beliefs, the authors dealing with Nixon and Kissinger's policies often refer to their background and experience when they were children.¹³ According to this view, their childhood and youth experience and traumas played the chief role in forming their later political attitudes. Paying too much attention to their early life often led to overrating the impact of this experience. Both Nixon and Kissinger were reluctant to speak about this period of their lives in public and if they did, they tried to diminish the importance and extent of suffering some authors attributed to them. An analysis of their political interconnection, later cooperation and views on the world would not be possible, however, without at least a brief outline of the conditions and circumstances that had affected them before they entered office. When we look more closely at their life journeys, a few unifying factors, that later determined their political careers to a great extent, can be recognised.

The most prominent features they shared were being suspicious of elites all their lives and feeling insecure. Nixon's grudge had its roots in the fact that despite all his achievements, he did not feel accepted by members of the "higher society", significant liberals and intellectuals. In his memoirs, Kissinger described the relationship of the Harvard elites towards the future President

¹³ Ferguson claims, for example, that Kissinger's youth experience made him considerably strong, which he used later when achieving his political goals. Ferguson, *Kissinger*, 867. Del Pero emphasises the influence of Kissinger's Jewish origin, especially his experience in the army and, consequently, his view of the world. Mario Del Pero, *The Eccentric Realist: Henry Kissinger and the Shaping of American Foreign Policy* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2013), 45. The impact of his Jewish origin and his experience of the liberation of concentration camps are also described in a letter written by Kissinger shortly after the war finished. This letter is a reaction to the cruelty he witnessed in Germany. When being involved in the disposal of corpses, he arrives at a sad conclusion "That Is Humanity in the Twentieth Century". "The Eternal Jew," 1966, A. Kissinger papers, part II, Series I, Early Career and Harvard University, Yale University library, accessed 16 August 2022, https://findit.library.yale.edu/images_layout/view?parentoid=11786942&increment=0. Black analyses the impact of Nixon's coming of age on his character; he states that his Quaker upbringing and modest background strongly stimulated his renowned ambition. Conrad Black, *Richard M. Nixon: A Life in Full* (New York: Public Affairs, 2008), 43.

as follows, “I had taught for over ten years at Harvard, where, among the faculty, disdain for Richard Nixon was established orthodoxy”.¹⁴ Kissinger had a similar experience: while studying at Harvard, he did not have access to the elite clubs because of his origin, and the local elites continuously kept him at a distance.¹⁵ As Coral Bell stated, neither of them belonged to “the Liberal intellectual foreign-policy elite”, and that fact connected them.¹⁶

Despite the disadvantages, the 1950s meant a period of fast career advancement for both Nixon and Kissinger. For the former, the growth was associated with his political activities that led to the position of Vice-president and, subsequently, to his Republican presidential nomination in 1960. Kissinger's rise was more linked to the academic sphere in that period; he first worked as a professor in the Government Department at Harvard University, and later, after publishing his bestseller entitled “Nuclear Weapons and Foreign Policy”, he became a highly accomplished expert in national security issues.¹⁷ While President Eisenhower recommended his staff members read Kissinger's book, its author – a Harvard professor at that time – began to speak out against the American foreign-policy strategy in the 1950s and thus, for the first time, indirectly set himself against Nixon as well.¹⁸ As Vice-president, Nixon tried to actively participate in the creation process of Eisenhower's diplomatic strategies.¹⁹

¹⁴ Kissinger, *Roky v Bílém domě*, 13.

¹⁵ Jeremi Suri, *Henry Kissinger and the American Century* (Cambridge: Belknap Press: An Imprint of Harvard University Press, 2009), 11.

¹⁶ Coral Bell, *The Diplomacy of Detente: the Kissinger Era* (London: Martin Robertson, 1977), 44.

¹⁷ Henry Kissinger, *Nuclear Weapons and Foreign Policy* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1957). Although this book from 1957 was probably Kissinger's most outstanding contribution to the U.S. foreign policy role of the “nuclear times”, the future Secretary of State continued to write essays and thus contributed to the national debate on the U.S. strategy over the following years. His paper from 1966, for instance, urgently warned against the serious threat associated with the development of the Soviet nuclear arsenal and a lack of U.S. defence policy, see “American Strategic Doctrine and Diplomacy, The Theory and Practice of War,” 1966, Henry A. Kissinger papers, part II, Series I, Early Career and Harvard University, accessed 10 July 2022, https://findit.library.yale.edu/images_layout/view?parentoid=11786912&increment=0.

¹⁸ Steven Wagner, *Pursuing the “Middle Way,”* [lecture] History 410: Eisenhower and the 1950s. Joplin: MSSU, September 7, 2021. Kissinger blamed the then administration that the U.S. foreign policy in their hands “is based on the doctrine of massive retaliation... we base our policy on the threat that will involve the destruction of all mankind ...” Mike Wallace, “Interview with Henry Kissinger,” Interview by Henry Kissinger, Harry Ransom Center, 13 July 1958, video, 29:16. <https://hrc.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collection/p15878coll90/id/67/>.

¹⁹ The records of the NSC negotiations about the options of conducting U.S. foreign policy during the “Eisenhower era” confirm the fact; Nixon often acted in a very distinctive way. On Nixon's role in the negotiations on foreign policy within Eisenhower's administration, see, for example,

After a series of outstanding career achievements in the 1950s, however, they both experienced a fierce encounter with reality at the beginning of the new decade. The failure in the presidential election against Kennedy in 1960 prevented Nixon from having the position to make major political decisions for the next eight years. For Kissinger, Kennedy's arrival at the White House meant the first opportunity to exercise executive power in foreign policy; he was invited to join the advisory board, but was disappointed with his position within the administration, and gradually resigned to pursue his own political ambitions.²⁰

Even if he returned to Harvard, Kissinger soon appeared to be again at the centre of crucial diplomatic negotiations, unlike Nixon. In 1967, Kissinger was asked to join Johnson's advisory team, whose mission was to find new options in the ongoing war in Vietnam.²¹ This was a pivotal moment for Kissinger's future: owing to the position, he became one of the most recognised experts in issues of U.S. activities in Vietnam; later, which helped him obtain a post in Nixon's team after the 1969 elections.²²

In the meantime, while there were secret negotiations between Kissinger and the Vietnamese, the first Kissinger and Nixon encounter occurred; they shortly met in December 1967 at Claire Boothe Luce's party.²³ Their meeting was not long, however, and did not suggest much about their future cooperation. A much more significant event for their future professional connection

Memorandum of Discussion at the 303d Meeting of the National Security Council, Washington, 8 November 1956, FOREIGN RELATIONS OF THE UNITED STATES, 1955–1957, EASTERN EUROPE, VOLUME XXV, Office of the Historian, accessed 15 February 2022, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1955-57v25/d175> or Memorandum of a Conference with the President, White House, Washington, 5 November 1956, FOREIGN RELATIONS OF THE UNITED STATES, 1955–1957, EASTERN EUROPE, VOLUME XXV, Office of the Historian, accessed 14 February 2022, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1955-57v25/d168>.

²⁰ Marvin Kalb and Bernard Kalb, *Kissinger* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1974), 64.

²¹ Kissinger participated in long-term secret negotiations in Paris with the North Vietnamese under the auspices of Johnson's government that were supposed to find a solution to end the conflict between the two parties. On Kissinger's negotiations in Paris, see Editorial Note, 1967, 263, FOREIGN RELATIONS OF THE UNITED STATES, 1964–1968, VOLUME V, VIETNAM, Office of the Historian, accessed 11 February 2022, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1964-68v05/d263>.

²² Later, he called the Vietnam War “the most significant political experience of an entire American generation.” See Henry Kissinger, “Lesson of Vietnam,” accessed 3 July 2022, <https://www.henrykissinger.com/articles/lesson-of-vietnam/>.

²³ See Bruce Mazlish, *Kissinger: The European Mind in American Policy* (New York: Basic Books, 1976), 213 or *Salt Lake Tribune*, 3 December 1968, 3, Salt Lake City, Utah, US, <https://newspaperarchive.com/salt-lake-tribune-dec-03-1968-p-3>. Clare Booth Luce was a significant Conservative politician, journalist and Nixon's long-time supporter.

had occurred a few months before the party, when Nixon published one of his most influential articles of his career with the title *Asia After Vietnam* in the October issue of *Foreign Affairs* magazine.²⁴

The article's contents strongly suggested why its author, later in the role of the President, chose to appoint Kissinger as the NSA. His article indicated that it was vital for U.S. foreign policy that American diplomacy concentrate on more complex issues than just the ongoing war with Vietnam. Indirectly, it urged the government to start showing an interest in the options of developing mutual relationships with China. Such a view was much the same as Kissinger's understanding of the world; it was based on his conviction that U.S. diplomacy should focus more on the relations with the principal world powers previously neglected by Johnson's administration – chiefly because of the Vietnam War. In addition, both Nixon and Kissinger had an interest in creating foreign policy based on the idea of “the grand strategy”, a broad global vision for the future of U.S. diplomacy that would not invest all its energy in the specific problems of the countries of minor importance.²⁵

Searching for a National Security Advisor

Despite similar opinions on the fundamentals of the U.S. geopolitical strategy, the selection to appoint Kissinger as the NSA might have encountered many obstacles. Each of them could have prevented him from being appointed and could have diverted the U.S. foreign policy of the 1970s in a different direction. Concerning Kissinger's earlier critical attitude to the new President and his connections with Nixon's major political opponents, the most obvious issue to question was the above-mentioned trustworthiness.²⁶

Considering this criterion, it was a paradox that Kissinger's reputation of being a “Rockefeller's man”²⁷ posed a more serious threat to his appointment

²⁴ See Richard Nixon, “Asia after Vietnam,” *Foreign Affairs* 46, No. 1 (October 1967): 111–125.

²⁵ Winston Lord, Kissinger's long-time advisor, states the shared attitude that the long-term strategy created a strong connection between Nixon and Kissinger. Lord, *Kissinger*, 130.

²⁶ Kissinger was linked with both of the largest American parties over a long period. In the 1960 presidential elections, when he was to choose between two candidates, Nixon and Kennedy, he voted for the Democratic one, Heather Lehr Wagner, *Henry Kissinger: Ending the Vietnam War* (New York: Chelsea House, 2007), 44.

²⁷ The close bond between the two politicians can be proved by the fact that Rockefeller sent 50 thousand dollars to Kissinger's account in 1974 with a commentary that the gift should express his “gratitude for his long-time service” Robert McFadden, “D. ROCKEFELLER GAVE KISSINGER \$50,000, HELPED 2 OTHERS,” *New York Times*, 6 October 1974, <https://www.>

than his political activities in advisory positions for governments of Democratic presidents. As a matter of fact, Kissinger worked for Rockefeller, a perennial candidate for the Republican presidential nomination and a favourite of the GOP Liberal wing, as a key advisor for many years. He held this position even at the time when Rockefeller stood up against Nixon in the battle for the 1968 nomination.

The tension between Rockefeller and the Conservative wing of the Republican Party was a long-time phenomenon that necessarily affected one of the most distinctive members of his advisory board. The conservatives' hatred of Kissinger became a widely known fact. As an example of the antipathy, we could quote a threatening message that Kissinger received from Goldwater's²⁸ Conservative supporters during the Republican convention in 1964 saying, "Kissinger – don't think we'll forget your name".²⁹ Due to this tension, no one could have predicted that he would become a leading figure of the administration, supported by the Conservative Republican wing.

Thus, for Nixon, Kissinger's appointment as the NSA necessarily represented an obstacle on the path towards better relationships with the Conservative wing of the party, whose influence was constantly on the rise and whose support was desperately needed for the President. Another item on the list of perils of Kissinger's appointment that needs to be mentioned was his background, which cannot have been "a hearty recommendation for membership in the inner circle of Richard Nixon, where anti-Semitic commentaries could be heard on a regular basis."³⁰ Given the number of these reasons, his appointment to such a high advisory position did not seem like a reasonable move.

[nytimes.com/1974/10/06/archives/rockefeller-gave-kissinger-50000-helped-2-others-he-denies-any.html](https://www.nytimes.com/1974/10/06/archives/rockefeller-gave-kissinger-50000-helped-2-others-he-denies-any.html).

²⁸ Barry Goldwater was a Republican presidential candidate in the 1964 election. Later in an interview, Kissinger described that Goldwater's movement inside the GOP manifested itself by "a kind of intolerance toward opposition. It then became characteristic of both the extreme Right and the extreme Left, and they changed sides occasionally." Jacob Heilbrunn, "The Interview: Henry Kissinger," interview by Henry Kissinger, *National Interest*, 14 May 1969, <https://nationalinterest.org/feature/the-interview-henry-kissinger-13615>.

²⁹ Ferguson, *Kissinger*, 605.

³⁰ Jussi M. Hanhimäki, *The Flawed Architect: Henry Kissinger and American Foreign Policy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 2.

Transformation of the National Security Council

All these arguments against Kissinger's appointment were outweighed by both Nixon's clear vision of the NSC transformation and a perfect choice in his mind as to who should carry out the transformation. He was convinced of the need for a new strategy in conducting foreign policy because of his long-time experience during Eisenhower's administration years; he also made careful observations of how American diplomacy was executed throughout the presidency years of Kennedy and Johnson.

Nixon was an eyewitness to the limits the NSA had to experience at the time of Eisenhower's administration – its function was diminished to merely a manager's position; moreover, he could follow the further depreciation of the role from a distance during Johnson's presidency.³¹ Affected by his unpleasant experience from the times when he worked for advisory boards of Democratic administrations, Kissinger unequivocally agreed with Nixon, as is apparent from his claim that "President Johnson's attempt at reform (of the NSC)... failed to do the job, since the main decision-making body ... had no formal agenda ..."³²

Kissinger later reflected on his experience and views while working within a group called "Harvard Study Group on Presidential Transition", which was supposed to create a plan for how Nixon should act in his office if elected.³³ Placing an emphasis on the importance of the NSC in their reports and, therefore, downplaying the role of the U.S. Department of State, was exactly what Nixon required. In his considerations, which were subsequently transformed into the articulation of the plans, Kissinger favoured the idea of "a strong NSC serving an assertive president".³⁴ Simultaneously, such a constellation would necessarily mean reducing the decision-making powers of the U.S. Department of State.

³¹ Asaf, Siniver, *Nixon, Kissinger, and U.S. Foreign Policy Making: the Machinery of Crisis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 51. Johnson tended to rely more on personal connections with a few of his advisors than on general decisions made by the council.

³² *Ibid.*, 57.

³³ Ferguson, *Kissinger*, 845. For more details on Kissinger's publishing activities in 1968, see Joseph Kraft, "Major Gain on Foreign Policy," *Eureka Times Standard*, 15 December 1968, 4, Eureka, California, US, <https://newspaperarchive.com/eureka-times-standard-dec-15-1968-p-4/> or Theodore Shabad, "Soviet Hopes U.S. to Cut Foreign Role," *Mason City Globe Gazette*, 24 January 1969, 9, Mason City, Iowa, US, <https://newspaperarchive.com/mason-city-globe-gazette-jan-24-1969-p-9/>.

³⁴ Elizabeth Borgwardt, Christopher McKnight Nichols and Andrew Preston, *Rethinking American Grand Strategy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2021), 281.

Nixon was well aware of the significance of Kissinger's role within the group in terms of the published proposals; this made him believe that he would be the right person capable of completing the institutional transformation of the U.S. foreign policy implementation in favour of the NSC. It is true that their agreement about the issues of the internal organisation of the U.S. institutions involved in foreign policy was critical. The fact that both politicians had the same views, however, on the particular goals to achieve by the institutions on the international scene was even more important for their mutual professional collaboration.

With regard to the geopolitical situation, Nixon and Kissinger agreed especially on the need for tactics change in the Vietnam War and, at the same time, in the transformation of the American attitudes towards the two major communist world powers – the Soviet Union and China. Essentially, they both believed in the need to negotiate with the North Vietnamese representatives, gradual withdrawal of the U.S. Army from the area of former Indochina, which would not result in degradation of the U.S. reputation and providing material and military support to the South Vietnamese army.³⁵

Kissinger, influenced by many travels to Vietnam during Johnson's presidency, came to these conclusions in his letters and articles written as early as before the 1968 election.³⁶ The impression they made was yet additional proof of the new President's right choice; Kissinger's vision later became one of the foundations of Nixon's policy of 'Vietnamization'. All the points listed above led Nixon to ask Kissinger to join his administration.

Unlike the complex motivations behind Nixon's choice, it is much easier to answer why Kissinger decided to accept Nixon's offer and work as the National Security Advisor – his motivation was rooted in his ambition and desire for

³⁵ On the plan and process of Vietnamization, see Guy J. Pauker, "An Essay on Vietnamization: A Report Prepared for Advanced Research Projects Agency," 1971, 107, accessed 11 July 2022, <https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/reports/2008/R604.pdf>. The emphasis on the need for 'Vietnamization' of the conflict was evident in the following memoranda that Kissinger, in the role of the NSA, sent to the President. See Memorandum From the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon, Washington, 10 September 1969, 117, FOREIGN RELATIONS OF THE UNITED STATES, 1969–1976, VOLUME VI, VIETNAM, JANUARY 1969–JULY 1970, Office of the Historian, accessed 7 July 2022, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76v06/d117>.

³⁶ For example, in June 1966, Kissinger wrote in *Look* magazine that from the American point of view, "The war in Vietnam is dominated by two factors: withdrawal would be disastrous, and negotiations are inevitable. American policy must take both of these realities into account." see "Vietnam Statement for *Look*," Image 15, 8 June 1966, Henry A. Kissinger papers, part II, Series I, Early Career and Harvard University, accessed 10 July 2022, https://findit.library.yale.edu/images_layout/view?parentoid=11787055&increment=2.

power.³⁷ The president's original vision of foreign policy execution, in which the NSC was supposed to play a significant role, enabled the new advisor to have almost unlimited access to the Oval Office and a direct influence on the U.S. foreign policy execution.

Kissinger's Appointment and the Subsequent Direction of U.S. Foreign Policy

Kissinger accepted Nixon's offer, and the new President could stand in front of the press in January 1969 and announce the new NSA to the public. Kissinger took over the office at a time when the lack of U.S. foreign policy success in the 1960s created high hopes for changes associated with the new pair in the White House. The expectations were described, for example, in an article published by Time magazine after Kissinger's appointment; the front page stated that with Kissinger at the helm, there would be "new approaches to friend and foe".³⁸

These hopes were encouraged by two factors: the first was a mutual agreement between the two politicians on what was later called "the grand strategy". The strategy was based on the new U.S. opportunities to open a series of negotiations with China and on the improvement of bilateral relations with the Soviet Union. These almost 'revolutionary' plans were based on the shared feeling of scepticism regarding the development of America's role in the world

³⁷ Kissinger's drive "to stand out as the best secretary of state in the country's history" while in office, according to Dallek, even "matched Nixon's reach for historical greatness" and it was thus the personality trait that united the two politicians. Dallek, *Nixon*, 614.

³⁸ "Presidential Adviser Kissinger: New Approaches to Friend and Foe," *Time*, 14 February 1969. After the announcement of Kissinger's appointment, high expectations could be observed even across the American regional newspapers. A regional California newspaper *The Press Telegram*, for instance, published a piece by James Reston, who wrote about the newly appointed NSA, that: "He is an intelligent, articulate, and remarkably industrious scholar, who also has had the experience of being a consultant to Presidents Kennedy and Johnson on many of the critical problems of the last decade — from Berlin to arms control." James Reston, "New Man in the Basement," *Press Telegram*, 4 December 1968, 36, Long Beach, California, <https://newspaperarchive.com/press-telegram-dec-04-1968-p-36/>. Other authors referred to Kissinger, for example, as 'Brisk, Demanding'. "Professor Kissinger 'Brisk, Demanding,'" *Columbia Missourian Newspaper*, 4 December 1968, 20, Columbia, Missouri, US, <https://newspaperarchive.com/columbia-missourian-newspaper-dec-04-1968-p-20/>. His reputation as a supporter of a hard line in foreign policy was often mentioned, however, at the same time, which caused some concerns among American journalists. See Glen, Elsassner, "Nixon Names Kissinger to Security Post," *Chicago Tribune*, 3 December 1968, 12, Chicago, Illinois, US, <https://newspaperarchive.com/chicago-tribune-dec-03-1968-p-12/> or "Kissinger Named To Security Post," *Abilene Reporter News*, 3 December 1968, 44, Abilene, Texas, US, <https://newspaperarchive.com/abilene-reporter-news-dec-03-1968-p-44/>.

and the current inability to solve the issues associated with the world-power rivalry during the Cold War.

While working as the NSA, Kissinger wrote in his diary that the core principle to follow when forming the U.S. foreign policy is that “Everything depends, therefore, on some conception of the future”. Nevertheless, when Nixon came to office, such a vision did not seem very promising.³⁹ To change the direction, there was a need for the new President, despite his conservative nature, to enter “uncharted waters” and establish a new foreign policy strategy. His unorthodox selection of the person to fill the post of the NSA implied that he was ready to carry out such a new policy.

The other factor to justify why the hopes were not far-fetched was that both politicians were fully prepared to make the critical diplomatic steps on the world scene. In fact, Nixon took office as probably the best-informed incoming President of all times regarding foreign relations, while Kissinger started his work when he had the position of one of the top experts specializing in the history of diplomacy and the field of Security and Strategy Studies.⁴⁰

Their in-depth expertise in the foreign-policy sphere emerged from very different backgrounds: Nixon’s erudition was gained through his vice-presidency experience in the 1950s when he was thoroughly engaged in negotiations with world leaders. Kissinger’s expertise had its roots in more of a theoretical background associated with his long-term activities as a Harvard professor who, until then, had not experienced directly holding the highest government posts.

Their different sources of knowledge and their personal insecurities became evident in the way they performed their functions. Because of the difference in their knowledge, they had to share their experience and collaborate closely; they were able to doubt themselves and question the purposes of those around them, which led to an effort to centralize the political power to the White House as much as possible. This resulted in a deepening distrust of bureaucratic apparatus, especially the U.S. Department of State, and an attempt to execute principal diplomatic tasks autonomously.

Nixon officially confirmed his trust in the abilities of the new NSA in May 1969; in a face-to-face meeting, he told the then Soviet ambassador to the USA, Anatoly Dobrynin, that issues of great importance should be dealt with

³⁹ Kissinger and Lord, *Kissinger on Kissinger*, 29.

⁴⁰ Before the 1960 election, for example, Eisenhower stated about Nixon that “There is no man in the history of America who has had such a careful preparation as has Vice President Nixon for carrying out the duties of the presidency, if that duty should ever fall upon him.” Nixon, *The Memoirs of Richard Nixon*, 177.

through Kissinger. He added how much he appreciated the effective operation of the “secret channel” between the Soviet embassy and the NSC.⁴¹ The Soviet Union responded favourably to the fact, and Dobrynin stated that from “the observations of Nixon and his main foreign policy advisors, it can be confidently declared that the dominant opinion influencing the President comes from Kissinger.”⁴² This decision, in fact, excluded the Department of State headed by Minister Rogers from the key negotiations within the Cold War. The President left the initiative mostly to the NSC, which had later far-reaching consequences for American-Soviet relations throughout Nixon’s presidency.

Conclusion

Nixon’s election as President at the end of 1968 and Kissinger’s subsequent appointment as the National Security Advisor began a period of highly significant political collaboration that, for the following five years, determined the changes in global international relations to a great extent. The then President paired up with his NSA; the partnership connected extensive practical and theoretical experience from the international environment, which they applied to real politics. The first half of the 1970s was consequently characterized by their efforts to reduce the tension between the rival world powers; that was most apparent in 1972 when Nixon participated in the Beijing summit with Chinese leader Mao in February and the Moscow summit with Soviet General Secretary Brezhnev in May.⁴³

The negotiations in those summits later led to unprecedented agreements between Americans and the two major Communist powers. The agreements based on the negotiations in Beijing initiated a process that later proved to be essential in economic collaboration between China and the West. Furthermore, the agreements made in Moscow turned out to be key elements of

⁴¹ Memorandum of Conversation (USSR), 14 May 1969, 4, Meeting Between Nixon and Dobrynin, accessed 16 August 2022, <https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB233/5-14-69.pdf>.

⁴² Raymond Garthoff, *Detente and Confrontation: American-Soviet Relations from Nixon to Reagan* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 1994), 80.

⁴³ Although Nixon’s role was crucial to the development of US-Soviet and US-Chinese relations, Kissinger also played a very important role in the development of US foreign policy strategy during this period. It is because of Henry Kissinger’s importance to the development of American policy that Robert Dallek, in his book, named this period “The Nixon-Kissinger Presidency”. Dallek, *Nixon*, 534.

world security that reduced the fatal threat of using nuclear weapons.⁴⁴ Shortly afterwards, the Americans managed to reach agreements to end American military involvement in Vietnam.⁴⁵

The new administration reached all the agreements despite the fact – in Kissinger’s words – that it entered office at a time when “the intellectual capital of U.S. post-war policy had been used up”.⁴⁶ In reality, the events of the 1960s associated with the Vietnam War and internal unrest pointed to the fact that U.S. power was on the decline, and there were no new ideas that would rectify its position on the world scene. After his election victory, Nixon was well-aware of the situation. He wanted to find a person suitable to head the NSC and capable of coming up with a new concept of foreign policy execution. Kissinger’s ideas of “the grand strategy” that had occurred in his early texts from the 1960s must have therefore impressed him.⁴⁷

Kissinger’s approach to international policy issues from a philosophical perspective made the newly-elected President appoint him to such a prominent position in spite of many contradictions: Kissinger had an unusual background and no prior experience in high government positions; in addition, he often criticized Nixon’s abilities and, at the same time, was linked with Nixon’s arch-enemy from the Republican party during his career.

Despite all these negatives, Nixon perceived as the key point that they both believed in the same institutional vision of foreign policy execution and

⁴⁴ The Shanghai Communique was signed by representatives of the USA and China, see Joint Communique between the United States and China, 27 February 1972, Box 73, President’s Personal Files (PPF), Staff Member Office Files (SMOF), Nixon Presidential Library and Museum, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, accessed 15 August 2022, <https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/121325>. On the SALT agreement between the USA and the USSR, see Strategic Arms Limitations Talks/Treaty (SALT) I and II, Milestones 1969–1976, Office of the Historian, accessed 12 August 2022, <https://history.state.gov/milestones/1969-1976/salt>.

⁴⁵ See “Paris Peace Accords,” 1973, accessed 16 August 2022, <https://www.docsteach.org/documents/document/paris-peace-accords>.

⁴⁶ Suri, *Henry*, 199.

⁴⁷ Kissinger wrote about the issue of the “grand strategy”, for example, in his celebrated article for *Foreign Affairs* magazine published in 1963, where he urged the need to create a new Euro-Atlantic Partnership that would transcend in importance “the crises which form the headlines of the day”, and, that future historians will perceive as the distinctive feature of the decade. “Strains on the Alliance. Foreign Affairs,” Image 3, January 1963, Henry A. Kissinger papers, part II, Series I, Early Career and Harvard University, accessed 10 July 2022, In: https://findit.library.yale.edu/images_layout/view?parentoid=11787055&increment=2. His papers of that time suggest that the future Secretary of State was not going to come to terms with the fact that the USA should react only to the impulses from the outer world; on the contrary, he believed that it was necessary to create a comprehensive foreign policy strategy that would be strongly pro-active.

simultaneously, they identified the same goals that the restructured diplomatic apparatus should strive to reach.⁴⁸ Their subsequent cooperation, ended by Nixon's resignation in 1974, had an influence not only on the American internal organizational setting of the decision-making process in foreign policy, but also on the actual direction of U.S. foreign policy in the following decades.

Abstract

The presented study examines the origins of cooperation between the US President Richard Nixon and his National Security Advisor and later Secretary of State Henry Kissinger. The aim of the paper is to analyse under what conditions Nixon's administration came to office in 1969, the causes that led the new President to approach Kissinger with the offer of a key foreign policy position and what attitudes both the protagonists had towards the U.S. role in the world. Despite being an unlikely partnership, their subsequent coopera-

⁴⁸ The debate among theorists in the field of international relations theory concerning the classification of Nixon and Kissinger as idealists or realists has long been a complex one. This is evidenced by insight into the literature on these two politicians. Del Pero, for example, entitled his book on Kissinger *The Eccentric Realist: Henry Kissinger and the Shaping of American Foreign Policy*, Thomas Schwartz also claims in his book that Kissinger "played a central role in the maneuvering and articulation of the realist revolution in American foreign policy" and, according to Suri, it was the "American Century" associated with the rise of Henry Kissinger that reflected a move away from democratic idealism and towards the realism of strong, authoritarian leaders. Thomas Alan Schwartz, *Henry Kissinger and American Power: A Political Biography* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2020), 162; Suri, *Henry*, 9. Niall Ferguson, on the other hand, entitled his authorised biography of Kissinger as *Kissinger: 1923–1968: the Idealist*, thus partially opposing the mainstream view, see Ferguson, *Kissinger*. Like Kissinger, however, Nixon was also a political figure whose realist or idealist leanings are not entirely agreed upon by historians. Hanhimäki, for example, noted that Nixon, although often considered a realist, used idealistic phrases in his speeches that resembled those of Woodrow Wilson. This combination of idealism and realism was already evident, for instance, in his inaugural address, where, while he idealistically promised that all the countries could join the United States in an effort "to reduce the burden of arms, to strengthen the structure of peace, to lift up the poor and the hungry", he also uttered the realist addendum that "All those who would be tempted by weakness, let us leave no doubt that we will be as strong as we need to be". Jussi M. Hanhimäki, *The Rise and Fall of Détente: American Foreign Policy and the Transformation of the Cold War* (Dulles: Potomac Books, 2012), 43. This mix of idealism and realism subsequently became typical of the Nixon administration on foreign policy. According to some, realism tended to dominate, while idealism dominated according to others. New York Times journalist Tom Wicker, for instance, argued that Nixon represented the "realistic side of the nation". Melvin Small, *A Companion to Richard M. Nixon* (New Jersey: Wiley Blackwell, 2011), 16. Nixon, on the other hand, portrayed himself as an idealist intent on doing what was best for his country. Ibid.

tion, which operated until Nixon's resignation in August 1974, significantly changed the course of the Cold War. During Nixon's administration, the crucial summits between Americans and representatives of the then Communist powers took place in Beijing and Moscow in 1972, becoming the most prominent diplomatic legacy of their efforts to reduce international tensions. Up to that time, in contrast, similar attempts to negotiate with China and the USSR were unprecedented due to the then tense geopolitical situation associated with the ongoing Cold War. The study concludes that the fundamental reason for this unexpected connection between two different politicians was a shared vision of transforming the decision-making process within the American administration and the idea of a grand strategy in international politics that would get the United States out of the crises of the 1960s.

Keywords: Richard Nixon; Henry Kissinger; Cold War; Republican Party; U. S. Foreign Policy; Détente; National Security Council

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