



BARBARA KEYS

## Bernath Lecture

### Henry Kissinger: The Emotional Statesman\*

"That poor fellow is an emotional fellow," a fretful Richard Nixon observed about Henry Kissinger on Christmas Eve 1971. The national security adviser had fallen into one of his typical postcrisis depressions, anguished over public criticism of his handling of the Indo-Pakistani War. In a long, meandering conversation with aide John Ehrlichman, Nixon covered many topics, but kept circling back to his "emotional" foreign policy adviser. "He's the kind of fellow that could have an emotional collapse," he remarked. Ehrlichman agreed. "We just have to get him some psychotherapy," he told the president. Referring to Kissinger as "our major problem," the two men recalled earlier episodes of Kissinger's "impossible" behavior. They lamented his inability to shrug off criticism, his frequent mood swings, and his "emotional reactions." Ehrlichman speculated that Nelson Rockefeller's team had "had all kind of problems with him," too. Nixon marveled at how "ludicrous" it was that he, the president—beset with enormous problems on a global scale—had to spend so much time "propping up this guy." No one else, Nixon said, would have put up with "his little tantrums."<sup>1</sup>

Kissinger's temper tantrums, jealous rages, and depressions frequently frustrated and bewildered the president and his staff. Kissinger habitually fell into a state of self-doubt when his actions produced public criticism. When his support for the Cambodian invasion elicited a media frenzy, for example, Kissinger's second-in-command, Al Haig, went to Nixon with concerns about his boss's "very emotional and very distraught" state.<sup>2</sup> Journalists often found what William Safire called "Kissinger's anguish—an emotion dramatized by the man's ability to let suffering show in facial expressions and body

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1. Tape No. 309-1, 24 December 1971, White House Tapes. <http://www.nixontapes.org/chron2.html> (accessed April 27, 2011). (Speaking to Nelson Rockefeller on the phone the same day, Nixon asked him to help cheer up Kissinger.) See also the partial transcripts in Richard A. Moss, "Behind the Back Channel: Achieving Détente in U.S.-Soviet Relations, 1969–1972" (Ph.D. diss., George Washington University, 2009), 290–92, 471–74. For Ehrlichman's account of the conversation, see John Ehrlichman, *Witness to Power: The Nixon Years* (New York, 1982), 307.

2. Quoted in Walter Isaacson, *Kissinger: A Biography* (New York, 1992), 224.

movements”—an endearing quality, but Nixon regarded it as a sign of weakness.<sup>3</sup> As Nixon and Ehrlichman lamented in their Christmas Eve conversation, Kissinger's consuming jealousy of Secretary of State Bill Rogers was another key trigger for emotional outbursts. An incident as innocuous as Rogers's meeting with a foreign ambassador—in other administrations a routine matter for the secretary of state—might elicit a towering rage from his rival on the National Security Council. Rogers's attempts to play a role in foreign policy produced repeated resignation threats from Kissinger. Just a few months after taking office, Nixon had become so tired of Kissinger's rants about Rogers that he constituted a special “Henry-Handling Committee.” Ehrlichman, Chief of Staff H. R. Haldeman, and Attorney General John Mitchell were supposed “to calm Kissinger and keep him on an even emotional keel.”<sup>4</sup> They succeeded only in keeping some of Kissinger's outbursts out of earshot of the president.

Kissinger's famously volatile temper was a perpetual source of trepidation for his much-abused staff. “Why have I been inflicted with such incompetents!” he would bellow, grabbing a staffer's memo, throwing it to the floor, and jumping up and down on it. “When he stamps a foot in anger, you're okay,” one National Security Council (NSC) aide recounted. “It's when both feet leave the ground that you're in trouble.”<sup>5</sup> With self-deprecating humor he joked, “Since English is my second language, I didn't know that *maniac* and *fool* were not terms of endearment.” After moving out of the White House basement to a bigger office, he complained that it now took him so long to stomp across the room to where his staffer sat that he sometimes forgot what he was angry about.<sup>6</sup> The press, the diplomatic corps, and even foreign leaders were not safe from displays of his anger. During negotiations in May 1974, to cite one example, he yelled and threw a map across the table at Israeli Defense Minister Moshe Dayan.<sup>7</sup> After one notable outburst over a leak, Soviet ambassador Anatoliy Dobrynin reported to the Kremlin that Kissinger had displayed “hot temper and lack of self-control, combined with tinges of semi-hysteria.” Dobrynin claimed to have chided him, “one must control one's emotions.”<sup>8</sup>

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3. William Safire, *Before the Fall: An Insider's View of the Pre-Watergate White House* (Garden City, NY, 1975), 192.

4. Isaacson, *Kissinger*, 209; Ehrlichman, *Witness to Power*, 297–98. Kissinger was well aware of the Nixon inner circle's concerns about him. Writing of the 1970 Cienfuegos crisis, for example, Kissinger says he knew that approaching Haldeman with his concerns was likely to be interpreted as “a sign of emotional instability.” Henry Kissinger, *White House Years* (Boston, 1979), 642.

5. Isaacson, *Kissinger*, 187, 192.

6. *Ibid.*, 193.

7. *Ibid.*, 571.

8. The chastisement was in Dobrynin's report to Moscow, but almost certainly, given Dobrynin's understanding of Kissinger's ego, was not actually uttered. Memorandum of Conversation, Dobrynin to Moscow, May 12, 1971, in *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969–1972*, sup. ed. Edward C. Keefer (Washington, DC, 2007), 354 (hereafter *SAR*). For the transcript of the telephone conversation, in which Kissinger harangues Dobrynin at length about an apparent attempt to bypass the backchannel, see *ibid.*, 342–49.

Temper tantrums, jealousy-induced rages, depressions, and displays of anguish are not usually regarded as natural accoutrements of *Realpolitik*. Yet Kissinger's well-documented inability to control his emotions has had no discernible effect on his reputation as "the ultimate realist."<sup>9</sup> Such is the power of the Kissinger-as-realist iconography that scholars have generally reacted to Kissinger's emotionalism either by ignoring it or treating it as a titillating sideshow. Walter Isaacson's moderately critical 1992 biography is the only major study of Kissinger to discuss his outbursts at any length, but the anecdotes amount to little more than colorful asides included to enliven the text rather than analyzed to reveal the man's inner workings.<sup>10</sup> The recent spate of Kissingerology tends to ignore his emotional side altogether. In impressive and insightful recent works—Mario Del Pero's brilliant study of Kissinger's thought, Jussi Hanhimäki's masterful account of Kissinger's diplomacy, and Jeremi Suri's revealing portrait of Kissinger as a product of "the American century"—the depressive, anger-prone statesman has almost disappeared.<sup>11</sup> In these works, as in much of the literature that treats Kissinger's role in particular issues and events, Kissinger appears above all as an intellectual.<sup>12</sup> His vanity, insecurity, penchant for secrecy, and overweening ambition are assigned to the category of "personality traits" or "character flaws" that sometimes inhibit or distort his rationality. Whereas Nixon has been the subject of numerous psychological studies and speculation that he was mentally ill, the predominant mode of analysis in Kissinger studies has been to assume Kissinger was a rational actor.<sup>13</sup> Scholars may find flaws his policies and his

9. Jussi Hanhimäki, *The Flawed Architect: Henry Kissinger and American Foreign Policy* (Oxford, 2004), 292.

10. Isaacson, *Kissinger*; see, for example, 192–95. Seymour Hersh's earlier treatment, *The Price of Power: Kissinger in the Nixon White House* (New York, 1983), emphasized Kissinger's egotism, drive for power, and penchant for secrecy and deception, but downplayed his temper and emotionalism. The effect was to portray Kissinger as cold and calculating—but in the service of his own interests, not the nation's.

11. Mario Del Pero, *The Eccentric Realist: Henry Kissinger and the Shaping of American Foreign Policy* (Ithaca, NY, 2010 [2006]); Hanhimäki, *Flawed Architect*; Jeremi Suri, *Henry Kissinger and the American Century* (Cambridge, MA, 2007). Del Pero's study does not mention emotion. Suri judges the "emotional scars" left by the experience of Nazi Germany to have influenced Kissinger's "basic understanding of social and political change" (48–50), but Kissinger is not described as emotional while in office except when he was appointed Secretary of State. In Hanhimäki's study, like Robert Schulzinger's concise 1989 biography, emotional states are occasionally noted but not analyzed. See, for example, Hanhimäki, *Flawed Architect*, 187–88, 212, 266; Robert D. Schulzinger, *Doctor of Diplomacy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989), 49, 168–69, 223, 240.

12. Jeffrey Kimball's rounded portrait of Kissinger is a notable exception; *Nixon's Vietnam War* (Lawrence, KS, 1998). Robert Dallek's study of the relationship between Nixon and Kissinger acknowledges some emotional influences on both men, but the portrayal leaves the impression that Kissinger was a moderating influence on an unstable president. Robert Dallek, *Nixon and Kissinger: Partners in Power* (New York, 2007).

13. Dallek writes that Nixon saw a psychiatrist after his 1962 defeat; *Nixon and Kissinger*, 352. Psychobiographies of Nixon include Bruce Mazlish, *In Search of Richard Nixon: A Psychobiographical Inquiry* (New York, 1972); Vamik D. Volkan, Norman Itzkowitz, and Andrew W. Dodd, *Richard Nixon: A Psychobiography* (New York, 1997). Nixon's own mental health was a subject of wide speculation even while in office. In the throes of the Watergate crisis in 1973, insinuations that

worldview, but they treat his views and actions primarily as the product of a rational mind; mistakes arise due to lapses in rationality.<sup>14</sup> As Hanhimäki, for example, explains one perceived overreaction, “even self-styled realists like Nixon and Kissinger could have an irrational knee-jerk response.”<sup>15</sup>

How is it that this most emotional of statesmen has escaped analysis of his emotions? Kissinger’s assiduously propagated self-portrayal deserves much of the credit. In thousands of pages of memoirs and countless interviews, he has relentlessly depicted himself as the consummate intellectual. His statesmanship, as he portrayed it, involved clear-headed and cold-hearted calculation of interests, a process in which there was no place for feelings. “The national interest can be calculated,” he wrote—and, he suggested, this is precisely what he had done.<sup>16</sup> Emotionalism, for him, was a term of opprobrium. To be emotional was to misjudge, to miscalculate, to mistake. He wrote admiringly of the “great classical tradition of European statesmanship,” according to which leaders “unemotionally assessed the requirements of the balance of power little influenced by ideology or sentiment,” instead concerned only with “calculation of the national interest and relationships of power.”<sup>17</sup> He attributed Metternich’s success to his “coolly and unemotionally arranging his combination.”<sup>18</sup> He praised the Chinese for their lack of emotion: “I think the Chinese are impressive because they are tough, unsentimental, calculating. They understand the world situation better than I would say anyone I have dealt with—not because they love us sentimentally, but precisely because they can overcome their sentiment in order to deal with us.”<sup>19</sup> He favored verbs like “calculate” and “measure” and adjectives like “precise,” “meticulous” and

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he had become unhinged circulated in government corridors and in the media. David Greenberg, *Nixon’s Shadow: The History of an Image* (New York, 2003), 257–59. Greenberg provides an excellent overview of Nixon psychobiography (*ibid.*, 232–69). Psychoanalytical studies of Kissinger appear to be limited to Dana Ward, “Kissinger: A Psychohistory,” *History of Childhood Quarterly* 2 (Winter 1975), 237–348; Bruce Mazlish, *Kissinger: The European Mind in American Policy* (New York, 1976), though even Mazlish suggests that “It is ultimately on the intellectual level, the level of Kissinger’s conceptualization, that one must seek to evaluate him most comprehensively” (*ibid.*, 291). Despite its title, Phyllis Schlafly and Chester Ward, *Kissinger on the Couch* (New Rochelle, NY, 1975), is an extended screed, not a serious psychological analysis.

14. Not all scholars uncritically accept that Kissinger was a realist. Frank Ninkovich and Mario Del Pero, for example, argue that Kissinger’s realism was a construct—in Del Pero’s account, a “discursive medium” that Kissinger used to explain his ideas. Frank Ninkovich, *The Wilsonian Century: U.S. Foreign Policy since 1900* (Chicago, 1999), 234; Del Pero, *Eccentric Realist*, 7–8, 66.

15. Hanhimäki, *Flawed Architect*, 100.

16. Henry Kissinger, *Diplomacy* (New York, 1994), 46.

17. Henry Kissinger, *Years of Upheaval* (London, 1982), 50.

18. Quoted in Schulzinger, *Doctor of Diplomacy*, 11.

19. Quoted in Hanhimäki, *Flawed Architect*, 340. In a similar vein he wrote of his own approach to Israel: despite the fact that “thirteen members of my family had died in Nazi concentration camps . . . I had to subordinate my emotional preferences to my perception of the national interest . . . It was not always easy; occasionally it proved painful. But Israel’s security could be preserved in the long run only by anchoring it to a strategic interest of the United States, not to the sentiments of individuals.” Kissinger, *Years of Upheaval*, 203–04.

“concrete.”<sup>20</sup> Perhaps because he lacked control over his emotional impulses, Kissinger worked extremely hard to deny them. In his conversations with Nixon, his staff, the press, and foreign diplomats, Kissinger lauded his realistic outlook. If the approaches of others met with his approval, he bestowed the ultimate encomium on them: they, too, were realists. When they did not, he chided them to put emotions aside in favor of realism.<sup>21</sup>

Despite what Kissinger would have us believe, his unusually overt emotional behavior is not a mere irrelevancy. The relationship between Kissinger the self-styled realist and Kissinger the tantrum-throwing depressive is not immaterial; on the contrary, both are equally central to understanding his views and actions. In this respect Kissinger is no different than every other policymaker—or every other human being: we are all influenced by emotion in fundamental and sometimes decisive ways. Even the most Herculean efforts to insulate policy choices from sentiment are doomed to failure.

Recent advances in neuroscience demonstrate without question that reason and emotion are intertwined. Clear-headed, cold-hearted calculation of interests in the absence of feelings is, quite simply, neurologically impossible. Kissinger's self-portrayal and his prescriptions for diplomacy are fundamentally flawed: there is no rationality without emotion. Cognition is profoundly influenced by feelings. The reverse is also true: emotions require an assessment of relevance and effects; hence, emotion is often shaped by cognition. In neurological terms, then, emotion and rationality are interconnected processes.<sup>22</sup> In the last two decades, cognitive and social psychology have seen an “emotional revolution,” which in turn has influenced economics, consumer research, and decision research. It has begun to influence political science approaches to understanding behavior and motivation and has helped to produce an “emotional turn” in the field of history.<sup>23</sup> Despite a significant body of work on psychology and issues such as perception and images, however, international history remains focused on cognitive processes and largely wedded to a way of understanding that privileges rationality as

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20. See, for example, Safire's list of Kissinger's favorite words, year by year; Safire, *Before the Fall*, 161. Indicating a change of public strategy rather than fundamental outlook, his favorite words in 1973 and 1974 were “compassion” and “honor,” respectively.

21. For example, Kissinger told Dobrynin that the South Vietnamese needed “to put their emotions aside” in favor of a “realistic approach”; *SAR*, 38.

22. For an overview, see Michel Tuan Pham, “Emotion and Rationality: A Critical Review and Interpretation of Empirical Evidence,” *Review of General Psychology* 11, no. 2 (2007), 155–78. On the cognitive elements involved in the experience of emotion, see Gerald L. Clore, “Why Emotions Require Cognition,” in *The Nature of Emotion: Fundamental Questions*, ed. Paul Ekman and Richard J. Davidson (New York, 1994), 181–91.

23. Rose McDermott, “The Feeling of Rationality: The Meaning of Neuroscientific Advances for Political Science,” *Perspectives on Politics* 2, no. 4 (December 2004), 693; Daniel Wickberg, “What Is the History of Sensibilities? On Cultural Histories, Old and New,” *American Historical Review* 112 (June 2007), 661–84; Barbara H. Rosenwein, “Worrying about Emotions in History,” *American Historical Review* 107 (June 2002), 821–45; Birgit Aschmann, ed., *Gefühl und Kalkül: Der Einfluss von Emotionen auf die Politik des 19. und 20. Jahrhunderts* (Stuttgart, Germany, 2005).

the assumed default.<sup>24</sup> With prominent exceptions, including Frank Costigliola's groundbreaking work, histories of policymaking too often embrace the false dichotomy that posits cognition and emotion as opposites and consigns the latter to the status of invisible, unapproachable, or unimportant.<sup>25</sup> The result is an impoverished and inaccurate conception of human motives. The factors that shape decisions, trigger actions, and lead to amity and enmity cannot be fully understood without grasping their central emotional components.<sup>26</sup> Overlooking or marginalizing the role of feelings in shaping actions and beliefs flattens, distorts, and misconstrues the wellsprings of human behavior.

Kissinger is an ideal subject for studying the intertwining of emotion and cognition, both because he was so overtly emotional in his behavior and because the Nixon administration is the most well-documented presidential administration in history. The rich documentation for Kissinger's tenure in office provides extraordinarily valuable material with which to investigate the cognitive-emotional nexus. The Nixon White House tape recordings, soon to be released in full, comprise 3,700 hours of conversations, about half of which relate to foreign policy and many of which include or touch on Kissinger. As national security adviser and as secretary of state, Kissinger kept transcripts of his telephone conversations. Also available are the virtually verbatim transcripts of his weekly staff meetings when he was secretary of state.<sup>27</sup> Other resources include Haldeman's voluminous diary and Dobrynin's reports to Moscow, compiled side by side with Kissinger's versions of the same meetings.<sup>28</sup> One key source

24. See also Birgit Aschmann, "Vom Nutzen und Nachteil der Emotionen in der Geschichte," in Aschmann, *Gefühl und Kalkül*, 31–32.

25. For a review of psychology in international history, see Richard Immerman, "Psychology," in *Explaining the History of American Foreign Relations*, 2nd ed., ed. Michael J. Hogan and Thomas G. Paterson (Cambridge, 2004), 103–22. See also Robert McMahon, "Credibility and World Power: Exploring the Psychological Dimension in Postwar American Diplomacy," *Diplomatic History* 15, no. 4 (1991), 456–58; McMahon's provocative address suggests that American policymakers' Cold War "preoccupation with credibility" was a psychological and, "perhaps implicitly, irrational" influence on policy; 456–58. Frank Costigliola, "After Roosevelt's Death: Dangerous Emotions, Divisive Discourses, and the Abandoned Alliance," *Diplomatic History* 34, no. 1 (January 2010), 1–23; Frank Costigliola, "'Like Animals or Worse': Narratives of Culture and Emotion by U.S. and British POWs and Airmen behind Soviet Lines, 1944–1945," *Diplomatic History* 28, no. 5 (November 2004), 749–80; Frank Costigliola, "'I Had Come as a Friend': Emotion, Culture, and Ambiguity in the Formation of the Cold War, 1943–1945," *Cold War History* 1, no. 1 (August 2000), 103–28. See also Jessica C. E. Gienow-Hecht, *Sound Diplomacy: Music and Emotions in Transatlantic Relations, 1850–1920* (Chicago, 2009), which argues that German musicians and conductors spawned an emotional affinity for Germany among Americans.

26. Ute Frevert in "Forum: History of Emotions," *German History* 28, no. 1 (2010), 68.

27. A useful summary is in Edward C. Keefer, "Key Sources for Nixon's Foreign Policy," *SHAHR Passport* (August 2007), 27–30. Most of the Nixon tapes are now publicly available, and the Nixon Library intends to release the full set by 2012. (There are, of course, redactions.)

28. H. R. Haldeman, *The Haldeman Diaries: Inside the Nixon White House; The Complete Multimedia Edition* (Santa Monica, CA, 1994); SAR; the Russian version is *Sovetsko-amerikanskii otnosheniia: Godi razriadki 1969–1976*, vol. 1 (Moscow, 2007). A second volume on the later years is planned.

remains out of reach: Kissinger's diary apparently remains in his possession.<sup>29</sup> Even so, the existing materials provide a unique "fly on the wall" vantage point for observing how Kissinger operated.

Even with such rich resources, studying the role of emotion in policymaking poses methodological challenges. Emotion is a slippery subject to study because it is an internal state that can leave ambiguous evidence. It is difficult, for example, to distinguish between deeply felt emotion, highly transient emotion, and emotion feigned for instrumental gain. Emotion is a capacious term, comprising moods; reflexive reactions such as fear and anger; longer-term affective commitments such as trust; and emotions that arise out of moral awareness, such as pride and shame.<sup>30</sup> Efforts to understand policymaking as a purely cognitive process face similar obstacles: here, too, influencing factors may be deep rooted, transient, or feigned; and policymakers have incentives to distort the record. Even decision-making assumed to be rational is a largely unconscious process that leaves ambiguous traces in the historical record. Yet the more opaque nature of the traces emotion typically leaves in the written record means that analyzing its effects is particularly challenging. The task is necessary, however, as historian Birgit Aschmann puts it, because cognition is only half the story.<sup>31</sup>

Kissinger's friendship with Anatoly Dobrynin offers one window into both the cognitive and emotional underpinnings of his policies. Although scholars have recognized the importance of Kissinger's relationship with Nixon, they have generally paid little attention to his other relationships while in office.<sup>32</sup> As a fledgling scholarly literature on the role of political friendship in international relations suggests, personal relationships often shape how leaders approach problems.<sup>33</sup> Far from simply "calculating" the national interest, Kissinger, too, was influenced by his relationships. Kissinger's long and intense friendship with

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29. According to one source, the diary has not been accessioned to the Library of Congress with Kissinger's other papers; "Introduction" to "The Kissinger Transcripts: A Verbatim Record of U.S. Diplomacy, 1969–1977," Digital National Security Archive (hereafter DNSA). The DNSA, in partnership with ProQuest, offers subscription-based online document collections (see <http://nsarchive.chadwyck.com>).

30. See Jeff Goodwin, James M. Jasper, and Francesca Polletta, "Emotional Dimensions of Social Movements," in *The Blackwell Companion to Social Movements*, ed. David A. Snow, Sarah A. Soule, and Hanspeter Kriesi (Malden, MA, 2004), 414–42.

31. Aschmann, "Vom Nutzen und Nachteil," 32.

32. On Kissinger's pre-White House relationships with key patrons such as Fritz Kraemer and Nelson Rockefeller, see Suri, *Henry Kissinger*.

33. Rafael Biermann has argued that in the 1980s and 1990s, genuine feelings of affection based on friendship were among the factors that convinced Soviet leaders to support German reunification. "Zur Bedeutung freundschaftlicher Verbundenheit in der Politik. Eine Annäherung am Beispiel des deutschen Einigungsprozesses," in Aschmann, *Gefühl und Kalkül*, 197–230. For an interesting and convincing account of how distrust and feelings of rebuff shaped American policymakers' views of the Soviet Union with fateful consequences in the immediate postwar years, see Costigliola, "I Had Come as a Friend." My argument is similar to Costigliola's, but in this case the feelings were positive rather than negative and the outcome was a desire for enhanced cooperation rather than conflict.

Dobrynin was both instrumental and affective.<sup>34</sup> Through both cognitive and emotional pathways, it affected the nature and content of his foreign policy choices.

Kissinger's friendship with the Soviet ambassador was perhaps the second most important of his professional connections, after his relationship with the president. In the 1970s, the far Right in the United States made much of Kissinger's friendly ties with Dobrynin, even suggesting that Kissinger was working for the Soviets, but it is only the recent declassification of reams of documents that allows us to see the inner workings of the relationship.<sup>35</sup> The documents—in particular the hundreds of telcons and memcons—show that Kissinger formed a bond of affection, trust, and mutual interest with Dobrynin that profoundly influenced his views and actions in ways that have hitherto been unrecognized. On a basic level, Kissinger's intimacy with Dobrynin helps explain his profound attachment to bipolarity; at particular moments it influenced his reactions to specific events. The documents, when read with attentiveness to both cognitive and emotional content, demonstrate that the importance of the relationship in general and the ways that its emotional resonances affected Kissinger should be taken into account in order to understand Kissinger's policies—not only toward the USSR, but toward most of the major issues he faced.

When Kissinger took office, Dobrynin had been in Washington for seven years, having arrived in 1962 just in time to be swept up in his first backchannel role, during the Cuban Missile Crisis. A protégé of Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko, known as a pragmatist rather than an ideologue, Dobrynin had come to the diplomatic service from a background in engineering.<sup>36</sup> His lack of early training in foreign languages showed in the heavily accented and not entirely fluent English he spoke even after many years in the United States.<sup>37</sup> Famed for his affability, the tall Ukrainian charmed Washington's power circles. Ambassador Arthur Hartman recalled that "everyone in D.C. opened their hearts to Dobrynin."<sup>38</sup> Ronald Reagan is purported to have said, "Dobrynin was doubtless a Communist, but I couldn't help liking him as a human being."<sup>39</sup>

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34. On the inseparability of instrumental and affective ties in fourteenth-century Florentine patronage relationships, see Dale V. Kent, *Friendship, Love and Trust in Renaissance Florence* (Cambridge, MA, 2009), 10.

35. For one example see Gary Allen, *Kissinger: The Secret Side of the Secretary of State* (Seal Beach, CA, 1976), esp. 10, 78, 121.

36. Dobrynin published little and remains something of a cipher. See Steven Merritt Miner, "Soviet Ambassadors from Maiskii to Dobrynin," in *The Diplomats, 1939–1979*, ed. Gordon A. Craig and Francis L. Loewenheim (Princeton, NJ, 1994), 609–28.

37. His taped conversations reveal his accent, and the tapes and the transcripts show that his command of English was not quite fluent: he misused or dropped definite and indefinite articles and occasionally made grammatical and syntactical mistakes characteristic of a nonnative speaker.

38. Quoted in Alistair Horne, *Kissinger: 1973, The Crucial Year* (New York, 2009), 143.

39. *Ibid.*, 141n.

Kissinger and Dobrynin met for the first time on February 14, 1969, just three weeks after the Nixon administration took office. Kissinger was attending a reception at the Soviet embassy; Dobrynin, recuperating from the flu, had Kissinger brought up to his private quarters, where he received the new national security adviser in his dressing gown.<sup>40</sup> Kissinger immediately began to press his case for establishing “a confidential channel” with the Soviet ambassador. Explaining that the State Department was unreliable and prone to leaking, Kissinger said that the president wanted him, rather than Foggy Bottom, to conduct “the most confidential exchange[s] of views with the Soviet leadership.” Handing the Soviet ambassador his personal telephone number, Kissinger expressed his readiness to meet “any time, any place,” at the White House or at Dobrynin’s apartment.<sup>41</sup>

Kissinger’s report to Nixon suggested that it was Dobrynin who had requested a confidential channel: “Dobrynin would like to conduct his conversations in Washington with some person you designate who has your confidence, but who was not part of the diplomatic establishment.”<sup>42</sup> Having been persuaded by Kissinger that such a channel could be useful, Nixon told Dobrynin at their first meeting on February 17 that he wanted Kissinger to maintain a confidential channel with the ambassador, much as Dobrynin had done with the Kennedy and Johnson administrations.<sup>43</sup> The secretary of state would also convey confidential messages from the president, Nixon was quick to add—although Kissinger would soon ensure that Rogers was cut out of the relationship.<sup>44</sup> Kissinger worked hard to create an intimate rapport with his new partner. At their sixth meeting, in April 1969, for example, Kissinger invited Dobrynin to his home late in the evening, giving the maid the night off and setting the tea table himself. “There were just the two of us in the whole house,” Dobrynin wrote to the Kremlin, and “[Kissinger’s] whole demeanor emphasized the particularly confidential nature of our discussion on Vietnam.”<sup>45</sup>

Over the course of their professional relationship, which lasted until Kissinger left office in 1977, the men formed a deep bond. Kissinger told Dobrynin he was “not just a colleague but a personal friend.”<sup>46</sup> They met without interpreters or aides, both speaking accented English. As historian Richard Moss tallies in his excellent study of the backchannel, Kissinger and Dobrynin had nearly forty meetings and spoke on the phone more than 450 times between February 1969 and the Moscow Summit in May 1972—on average, communi-

40. Kissinger, *White House Years*, 113.

41. Memorandum of Conversation, Dobrynin to Moscow, February 14, 1969, in *SAR*, 5.

42. Memorandum of Conversation, Kissinger to Nixon, February 15, 1969, in *ibid.*, 4.

43. Richard Nixon, *RN: The Memoirs of Richard Nixon* (London, 1978), 369.

44. *SAR*, 15.

45. Telegram (Extremely Urgent), Dobrynin to Soviet Foreign Ministry, 15 April 1969, in *SAR*, 53, 56.

46. Telcon, Dobrynin and Kissinger, August 23, 1973, “The Kissinger Telcons: The Dobrynin File,” National Security Archive. <http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB123/dobrynin.htm> (accessed 20 April 20, 2011) (hereafter NSA).

cating approximately four times a week.<sup>47</sup> At various periods, they had regular weekly meetings at which they would breakfast or lunch at the White House, Dobrynin arriving incognito through a side entrance and heading to the Map Room or the White House mess. Sometimes they met at Kissinger's house on Rock Creek or at Dobrynin's apartment. At times, they met almost daily, and their "channel" became so important that Nixon ordered the installation of a secure telephone between the White House and the Soviet embassy. "We would just lift our receivers and talk, without dialing," Dobrynin recalled.<sup>48</sup>

Describing the backchannel with evident fondness, Kissinger reminisced that it involved "intimate exchanges" on "the most sensitive business."<sup>49</sup> Kissinger likened the relationship to a romantic one. "You and I are going steady. We should exchange telephone numbers," he joked to Dobrynin over the phone in March 1971.<sup>50</sup> The two men bantered, poked fun at each other's personal foibles, and exchanged birthday wishes and gifts.<sup>51</sup> On one occasion they spent nearly four hours discussing major issues over caviar and liberal shots of vodka.<sup>52</sup> They joked about Kissinger's dates and his playboy status. Dobrynin tried to time his vacations around Kissinger's schedule. They watched films and went to concerts together.<sup>53</sup> They met each other's parents. When Kissinger returned from China, he invited four people to a private White House screening of Chinese-made newsreels that Zhou Enlai had sent him: his parents and the Dobrynins.<sup>54</sup> When Kissinger went to Moscow, Dobrynin flew with him on a U.S. government plane. Kissinger took Dobrynin on the presidential yacht and invited him overnight to Camp David—an unprecedented honor for the ambassador of America's chief antagonist. In California, Kissinger arranged for Dobrynin to be given an exclusive movie studio tour and asked his Hollywood connections to throw a dinner for the ambassador (Figure 1).<sup>55</sup> In Washington, he arranged for Dobrynin's three-year-old granddaughter to be photographed

47. Moss, "Behind the Back Channel," 50, 54. The DNSA collection "The Kissinger Telephone Conversations: A Verbatim Record of U.S. Diplomacy, 1969–1977" indicates that Dobrynin was a participant in 653 conversations over eight years; this total would comprise most but not all of their phone conversations.

48. Anatolyi Dobrynin, *In Confidence: Moscow's Ambassador to America's Six Cold War Presidents, 1962–1986* (New York, 1995), 200; see also *SAR*, xxi. Not surprisingly, Kissinger omitted to mention this fact in his own memoirs.

49. Kissinger, *White House Years*, 138.

50. Telcon, Kissinger/Dobrynin, 26 March 1971, in *SAR*, 323.

51. On vacations, see Telcon, Kissinger/Dobrynin, December 24, 1973, in DNSA, Kissinger Telcons; for examples of gifts, see *SAR* 125, 258; on birthday wishes, see Telcon, May 26, 1973, NSA.

52. *SAR*, 558.

53. On watching films, see *SAR*, 143, and Telcon, Kissinger/Dobrynin, January 25, 1975; for an invitation to go to a Frank Sinatra concert, see Telcon, Kissinger/Dobrynin, April 22, 1974; both in DNSA, Kissinger Telcons.

54. *SAR*, 651. On Dobrynin's efforts to arrange a meeting between Kissinger and his parents in Moscow, see *ibid.*, 634.

55. Dobrynin, *In Confidence*, 221, 244–45; *SAR*, 154; Telcon Robert Evans/Kissinger, June 28, 1972, DNSA Kissinger Telcons.



**Figure 1:** Anatoliy Dobrynin and Henry Kissinger look on as Kissinger's son David gets an autograph from actor Raymond Burr during a tour of Universal Studios, July 12, 1972. At the end of the tour Kissinger said, "I don't know which is the greater make believe world, the one where I am or this one" (AP Photo/George Brich).

sitting at the president's desk in the Oval Office and for Dobrynin's wife to have tea with the First Lady. (Arranging the tea, the two men engaged in a gratitude contest. Kissinger told Dobrynin that "both the President and Mrs. Nixon greatly appreciate [Dobrynin's] courtesy in making the suggestion" that his wife be invited for tea; Dobrynin protested that "the pleasure is ours. . . . Thank you very much." Kissinger responded, "And thank you. . . . It's appreciated here." Dobrynin vollied back, "I do appreciate your help." Kissinger protested, "Not at all, we appreciate what you're doing." Dobrynin concluded, "Oh, I think it's mutual.")<sup>56</sup> The genuine affection the men held for each other is illuminated by this 1974 exchange, after Dobrynin had been in Moscow for consultations:

Dobrynin: "It is good to hear your voice again."

Kissinger: "I have missed you."

Dobrynin: "Both ways."<sup>57</sup>

The two men felt at ease with each other almost from the beginning. They shared a European background and similar views on diplomacy: both valued "businesslike" approaches above all. When Kissinger was first invited to Dobrynin's private rooms in the embassy, the German émigré immediately felt at home:

<sup>56</sup>. Telcon, Kissinger/Dobrynin, April 10, 1972, DNSA Kissinger Telcons; Dobrynin, *In Confidence*, 198.

<sup>57</sup>. Telcon, Kissinger/Dobrynin, March 18, 1974, DNSA Kissinger Telcons.

he saw “two medium-sized living rooms open one onto the other, furnished almost identically in the overstuffed heavy Central European manner I remembered from my youth in Germany.”<sup>58</sup> Despite their very different personal histories, they had much in common. Kissinger gave Dobrynin the highest of all compliments, lavishing upon the Soviet ambassador the same descriptors he might have used for himself: “suave,” “subtle and disciplined,” “warm in his demeanor while wary in his conduct”; he “could understand the psychology of others.”<sup>59</sup>

Sharing secrets was central to Kissinger’s *modus operandi*. “Super K,” as *Time Magazine* dubbed him, routinely shared secrets, or gave the impression of sharing secrets, to strengthen relationships. NSC staffer Helmut Sonnenfeldt recalled, “He created a bond by sharing confidences and making snide comments about everyone else.”<sup>60</sup> “He was able to give a conspiratorial air to even the most minor of things,” Lawrence Eagleburger remarked. “It was rather adolescent at times.”<sup>61</sup> The penchant for bonding through confidences was perhaps nowhere more highly developed than with Dobrynin. From the beginning, Kissinger emphasized that the channel made Dobrynin part of an exclusive threesome. On one issue relating to the Vietnam War, he said to Dobrynin in early 1970, “you, I and the President are the only three people who are aware of it.” He joked about making Dobrynin “an honorary member of the White House staff.”<sup>62</sup> He showed Dobrynin classified documents.<sup>63</sup> Meeting with Gromyko in Moscow, with Dobrynin present, he remarked that “Dobrynin reads more messages we get from the Vietnamese than our Secretary of State does.”<sup>64</sup> During a 1972 flare-up in the Middle East, Kissinger astonishingly told Dobrynin that Israel had agents close to Sadat—in effect, revealing intelligence information about a U.S. ally to the partner of its enemy.<sup>65</sup> Kissinger regularly asked Dobrynin to keep information from Rogers. At one remarkable meeting in February 1972, Kissinger briefed Dobrynin on what he should and should not reveal in an upcoming meeting with the secretary of state, showing Dobrynin the doctored reports on U.S.-Soviet relations that had been given to Rogers. “It is a unique situation,” Dobrynin wrote to Moscow, “when the Special Assistant to the President secretly informs a foreign ambassador about what the Secretary

58. Kissinger, *White House Years*, 113.

59. *Ibid.*, 140.

60. Quoted in Isaacson, *Kissinger*, 189.

61. Quoted in *ibid.*, 190. This deeply ingrained practice helps explain his appeal to women. As Candice Bergen, a Hollywood star active in left-wing politics, recalled after driving home with him after a dinner party, he created an enticing sense of “shared secrets.” Bergen, *Knock Wood* (New York, 1984), 240–42.

62. *SAR*, 134n.

63. E.g., *ibid.*, 638.

64. *Ibid.*, 768.

65. *Ibid.*, 627. Kissinger urged the Soviets not to say anything to Sadat about a possible agreement with the United States because it could leak to the Israelis via Israeli intelligence agents close to Sadat, and the Israelis would then leak to the U.S. press to undermine Nixon.

of State does and does not know.”<sup>66</sup> Kissinger asked Dobrynin not just to keep secrets from Rogers, but also from the Germans, British, and French.<sup>67</sup> Kissinger also confided to Dobrynin about his difficulties working with Nixon and about Nixon’s “psychological idiosyncracies.”<sup>68</sup>

Despite Kissinger’s personal regard for Dobrynin, it was not a relationship among equals. The two men recognized each other as representatives of superpowers of equal status, and when Kissinger assumed office, Dobrynin was the elder statesman, in age and in experience. But even the dean of the foreign ambassadors in Washington ranked lower than the central foreign-policy adviser to the president. Kissinger, moreover, had the psychological advantage of being on his home turf. In their conversations Dobrynin was deferential, even subservient. He quickly recognized Kissinger’s ego and began to play on it. “You see how attentive to your remarks I am,” Dobrynin told Kissinger in one phone conversation.<sup>69</sup> Dobrynin often ended phone conversations with a “thank you” or “thank you, Henry.”<sup>70</sup> This aspect of the relationship fed Kissinger’s ego and in itself provided a reason to cultivate the backchannel. It is an important explanation for Kissinger’s devotion to the channel, even when it was not productive, as well as for his deeper commitment to Soviet-American relations as the central pivot of his foreign policy. The channel offered profoundly fulfilling psychological benefits to a deeply insecure political climber, stroking his ego and enlarging his own sense of self-importance. “You are making me a great man,” Kissinger told Dobrynin in 1974.<sup>71</sup> Indeed, in many ways Dobrynin played for Kissinger the same role that Kissinger played for Nixon: offering praise, soothing insecurities, working on call, rearranging his schedule to suit the other man’s, dependent for elevated status on the other’s favors.<sup>72</sup>

With Dobrynin, as with others, Kissinger was highly attuned to how much deference was shown him. Unlike Dobrynin, who took careful note of Kissinger’s emotional states, the only variable Kissinger measured was how his interlocutors treated him.<sup>73</sup> In part, Kissinger’s repeated references to indicators

66. *SAR*, 580–81.

67. *Ibid.*, 273–76.

68. *Ibid.*, 426.

69. Telcon, Kissinger/Dobrynin, April 12, 1976, DNSA Kissinger Telcons.

70. See, e.g., *SAR*, 805; Telcon Dobrynin/Kissinger March 15, 1973, DNSA Kissinger Telcons.

71. Telcon, Kissinger/Dobrynin, August 12, 1974, in DNSA Kissinger Telcons.

72. For examples, see *SAR*, 519, 572.

73. The exception was China. On occasions when this topic came up, Kissinger reported that Dobrynin “became very emotional.” *SAR*, 36. Judging from Dobrynin’s memos, Kissinger was an emotional negotiating partner and interlocutor; they frequently mention Kissinger’s emotional state. His descriptions of Kissinger include “somewhat excited” (*ibid.*, 531); “noticeably agitated” (*ibid.*, 570); “positively glow[ing] with pleasure” (*ibid.*, 152); “very heated” (*ibid.*, 667); “somewhat uneasy” (*ibid.*, 165); speaking in a “rather agitated tone” (*ibid.*, 167); “visibly pleased” (*ibid.*, 182); “visibly nervous” (*ibid.*, 206); “noticeably agitated” (*ibid.*, 248); “highly agitated” (*ibid.*, 316); “very nervous” (*ibid.*, 329); speaking “heatedly” (*ibid.*, 329, 375); and “worked up” (*ibid.*, 350), all in *SAR*.

of status betray his own insecurities; in part, he used them to convey to Nixon a sense of toughness and achievement. Thus, Kissinger's memos reported to Nixon that Dobrynin was "extremely cordial," "oily," "unusually affable," "extremely jovial," "very affable," "extremely friendly," and "especially jovial." Meetings proceeded with "great cordiality"; "effusive cordiality," or in an "extremely warm atmosphere."<sup>74</sup> Kissinger wrote of one meeting that Dobrynin's "eagerness to prove Soviet good faith was sometimes almost overpowering."<sup>75</sup> When speaking informally with Nixon, Kissinger conveyed the same meaning with more derisive terms. He repeatedly told his boss that Dobrynin was "slobbering."<sup>76</sup> "He was slobbering all over me," Kissinger said of one conversation, although the transcript of the conversation reveals nothing that fits that description.<sup>77</sup> At other times, Kissinger reported, Dobrynin was "pleading," "blubbing," "fell all over himself," "wept all over me," and "couldn't have been nicer." Only on the rarest of occasions was Kissinger taken aback by Dobrynin's "superciliousness."<sup>79</sup>

If Dobrynin, who was eager to demonstrate his value to the Kremlin by cultivating this important relationship, succeeded in ingratiating himself with Kissinger in ways that provided emotional sustenance to the national security adviser, the channel also provided Kissinger with an important means of ingratiating himself with Nixon. On some matters, Kissinger could—and did—use his reports to Nixon to create self-serving fictions without fear of contradiction. At the end of 1969, he told Nixon that Dobrynin expected him to be reelected. In fact it was Kissinger who had told Dobrynin that Nixon expected to win; for Nixon's eyes, he simply transposed the speaker. "K—very fascinating!" Nixon wrote at the top of the memo.<sup>80</sup> Using language typical of the kind of fawning obsequiousness Kissinger delivered to Nixon, he told the president in April 1972 that Dobrynin had called Nixon "a great mind, one of the greatest psychologists he's ever seen. He said that he is in awe."<sup>81</sup>

Kissinger frequently used his memos to Nixon about his talks with Dobrynin to press his case for elevating his own role at the expense of the State Department, typically in quite unobvious ways. For example, in April 1970, Kissinger claimed Dobrynin criticized State Department official Joseph Sisco as "ama-teurish." According to Kissinger, rather than "wast[ing] time" with Sisco,

74. *Ibid.*, 185, 491, 504, 595, 582, 664, 605, 502, 572.

75. *Ibid.*, 173.

76. *Ibid.*, 658, 665n.

77. *Ibid.*, 183–84.

78. *SAR*, 665; White House Tapes, Executive Office Building, Conversation No. 330–36, April 12, 1972, Doc. 95, in U.S. Department of State, *Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969–1976* (Washington, DC: 2006), 16: Soviet Union, available at <http://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76v14> (hereafter *FRUS* 16); *SAR*, 301n, 789n, 169n.

79. Quoted in Hanhimäki, *Flawed Architect*, 290.

80. *SAR*, 104, 110.

81. Conversation No. 330–36, Doc. 95, in *FRUS* 16.

Dobrynin “said that it would be good if I intervened.” Later Kissinger claims to have suggested that Dobrynin reacted with “extreme distaste” at the prospect of discussing certain issues with Sisco, and Kissinger therefore asked to be authorized to discuss them instead. Dobrynin’s memos to Moscow made no such points.<sup>82</sup> When Kissinger worried that his missteps in dealing with the Indo-Pakistani War had imperiled his position with the White House, he used the channel to help repair the damage. Although the taped conversation reveals nothing of the sort, he told Nixon that Dobrynin had said, “Let’s put [the war] behind us. Let’s work positively for the future.’ . . . He was very conciliatory and very—somewhat apologetic.”<sup>83</sup>

“Opponent, partner, friend”: thus did Dobrynin inscribe the copy of his memoirs he gave to Henry.<sup>84</sup> The two men did act as partners, at times colluding together to deceive their respective governments. Kissinger’s first two visits to Moscow—in April 1972 and May 1973—were presented to Nixon as invitations from the Soviets, but both appeared to have been engineered by him with some connivance from Dobrynin. Kissinger first raised the idea of a visit in November 1971, indicating to Dobrynin “that he would very much like to visit Moscow in order to discuss matters relating to preparations for the [1972 Nixon-Brezhnev] summit meeting.” As Dobrynin reported, Kissinger emphasized “the extreme sensitivity of this matter several times”—no doubt because he was raising it without Nixon’s approval—and “urged that his interest in making a trip to Moscow not be mentioned anywhere.” Kissinger’s memo of this conversation mendaciously reported to Nixon that Dobrynin had said “there was a great interest [in Moscow] in seeing me.”<sup>85</sup> A few weeks later, in a phone conversation with Nixon, Kissinger lied: “I haven’t talked to you about this—and we can’t do it—but they have been bugging me to come to Moscow. I don’t want to do it. I’ve just tried to use it because of the [Secretary of State] Rogers problem. But they’ve sent me a formal invitation now. I don’t want to do it, but he raised it again yesterday.”<sup>86</sup>

Unaware that Nixon viewed a trip to Moscow as inadvisable, Dobrynin blithely broached the subject in a March 17, 1972, meeting with Nixon: “Our friend Henry is very modest. Is he or is he not coming to Moscow?” Nixon replied that “a visit was impossible before the summit.” There had been a need for a preliminary trip to China, he explained, because “there was no Chinese Dobrynin in Washington,” but there was no reason for a similar trip to Moscow. It would also “break too much china in our bureaucracy,” needlessly antagonizing the State Department. Instead of conveying Nixon’s disapproval, Dobry-

82. *Ibid.*, 142, 143, 267, 269, 270.

83. White House Tapes, Oval Office Conversation No. 652–17, January 20, 1972, Doc. 38, in *FRUS* 16; cf. Telcon, Kissinger/Dobrynin, January 20, 1972, DNSA Kissinger Telcons.

84. *SAR*, x.

85. *Ibid.*, 527; cf. *ibid.*, 520.

86. White House Tapes, Oval Office Conversation No. 630–10, December 6, 1971, quoted in Moss, “Behind the Back Channel,” 268.

nin's report of the conversation was silent about a possible Kissinger trip to Moscow. It is quite likely that when Kissinger met privately with Dobrynin immediately after the meeting with Nixon, he asked the Soviet ambassador not to mention what Nixon had said.<sup>87</sup> Kissinger's maneuvering continued until he achieved his goal. On April 12 he told Nixon that Dobrynin had said "that a visit by me to Moscow was more urgent than ever. He thought that we should reconsider the decision for me not to go." What he told Dobrynin was that "Nixon believes that a brief trip . . . to Moscow is . . . advisable."<sup>88</sup> Having been told repeatedly that the Soviets were pressing for Kissinger to come, Nixon finally approved the trip, on condition that Kissinger make Vietnam the focus of his talks. The April trip, undertaken in secret but dramatically made public immediately afterward, increased Kissinger's public profile and furthered his relentless quest to best Rogers and the State Department. It also left Henry in Anatoli's debt.

It is not surprising that the Kissinger-Dobrynin backchannel developed its own momentum and generated pulls quite independent of the interests of the countries each side represented. As Sonnenfeldt observed much later, "the very existence of that particular way of doing business had something to do with the substance of the relationship."<sup>89</sup> SALT negotiator Raymond Garthoff perceptively noted that "one of the peculiarities of prolonged international negotiations is that 'transnational,' 'transdelegation' partnerships of interest develop, whereas unanimity of views may be lacking within a delegation."<sup>90</sup>

Above all, the deep, long-lasting relationship between "Khenry" and "Anatol" helps explain an element of Kissinger's worldview that otherwise remains puzzling. Although Kissinger guided U.S. foreign policy when the world was entering a new era of multipolarity, he remained obsessively wedded to bipolarism. Stanley Hoffmann calls Kissinger's strategy "maniacally bipolar."<sup>91</sup> Mario Del Pero calls Kissinger "rigidly" bipolar: "in the categories he used to read and decrypt the international system; in the kind of diplomatic initiatives he promoted; and in the objectives he set and intended to achieve."<sup>92</sup> Kissinger embraced triangular diplomacy and Nixon's opening to China—and indeed was personally drawn to Zhou Enlai—but his worldview remained rigidly hierarchical, with the two nuclear giants firmly at the top. Again and again,

87. SAR, 615, 617–22; Nixon, RN, 590–91.

88. SAR, 656; cf. *ibid.*, 657.

89. The National Security Council Project, *Oral History Roundtables: The Nixon Administration National Security Council, Center for International and Security Studies at the University of Maryland and the Brookings Institution, December 8, 1998* (College Park, MD, 1999), 25.

90. Raymond L. Garthoff, *Journey through the Cold War: A Memoir of Containment and Coexistence* (Washington, DC, 2001), 253.

91. Stanley Hoffmann, "Varieties of Containment," *Reviews in American History* 2 (June 1983), 281. On Kissinger's Soviet-centric frame, see also Hanhimäki, *Flawed Architect*, 56–67.

92. Del Pero, *Eccentric Realist*, 148. As Hanhimäki writes, "ultimately it was the Soviet Union that represented the primary concern of Kissinger's foreign policy against which all other issues were weighed." *Flawed Architect*, 55–56.

Kissinger's habit of approaching problems through this bipolar "cage" exacerbated instead of resolved them.<sup>93</sup> He misread the Indo-Pakistani War of 1971 as a proxy conflict between the Soviet Union and the United States, contributing to an infamous "tilt" toward Pakistan. For four years he continued to see in Moscow a route to peace in Vietnam, consistently overestimating Moscow's influence over Hanoi. All other countries were measured against the crucial relationship with Moscow, and local conditions around the globe, from Angola to Indonesia and East Timor, were viewed, and often misconstrued, within the framework of superpower relations.

Why was Kissinger so wedded to a bipolar view? For the most part, the scholarship on Kissinger takes this stance as a given. (Del Pero, for example, ascribes this fixation to "a deficit of realism."<sup>94</sup>) Kissinger's prioritization of U.S.-Soviet relations arose from intellectual predispositions and cognitive assessments of the balance of power, but it also had strong emotional roots that derived from Kissinger's complex and multifaceted friendship with Dobrynin. The affection and trust that sprang from his personal feelings about the Soviet emissary shaped Kissinger's perceptions of the Soviet Union, leading him to overestimate the overlap of interests between the two countries and to exaggerate Moscow's interests in helping the United States with its intractable problems, above all the Vietnam War.<sup>95</sup> The ease and habit of this relationship, and the practical and emotional benefits it brought, reinforced Kissinger's inclinations to see the U.S.-Soviet relationship as his primary focus in foreign affairs.

"The commonest thing is delightful if only one hides it," Oscar Wilde wrote. That Kissinger's relationship with Dobrynin—the backchannel—was a secret kept from the press and most of the rest of the Nixon administration constituted a central part of its allure. Partners in a secret relationship often become obsessively preoccupied with it and, at times, more attracted to the relationship than they might have been had there been no clandestine element. Deception and secrecy—staples of Kissinger's professional career—impose significant mental burdens: they are hard work to maintain. The keeper of a secret must think about it to remember what it is that should not be revealed, and this need to keep thinking about it often results in an obsessive preoccupation with the secret.<sup>96</sup> Kissinger maintained numerous backchannels, but none rivaled the one with Dobrynin in importance, intensity, and duration; because it was secret,

93. Del Pero, *Eccentric Realist*, 148; Hanhimäki, *Flawed Architect*, xviii-xix.

94. Del Pero, *Eccentric Realist*, 149.

95. Deborah Welch Larson takes the opposite approach, using cognitive and social psychology to argue that U.S.-Soviet mistrust, derived in part from cognitive biases, created missed opportunities for cooperation, including under Nixon and Brezhnev. *Anatomy of Mistrust: U.S.-Soviet Relations during the Cold War* (Ithaca, NY, 1997), 4-5, 155-89.

96. Daniel M. Wegner, Julie D. Lane, and Sara Dimitri, "The Allure of Secret Relationships," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 66, no. 2 (1994), 287-300. On the intrusive recurrence of thoughts about a secret, see Julie D. Lang and Daniel M. Wegner, "The Cognitive Consequences of Secrecy," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 69, no. 2 (1995), 237-53.

Kissinger had continually to remember innumerable details about what he could and could not say to allies and other U.S. officials about myriad issues, including SALT, West Berlin, the Middle East, and the Vietnam War negotiations. If the ease and pleasures of the channel created reasons for Kissinger to prefer to focus on U.S.-Soviet relations, the mental burdens of its confidential character added to his inclination to prioritize the relationship. It is no wonder that, as Kissinger told an interviewer, the Soviet Union was seldom out of his thoughts.<sup>97</sup>

It is not, of course, that Kissinger unreservedly liked and trusted Dobrynin. The relationship and the emotions it elicited were complex and variable. Kissinger did not unreservedly approve of Dobrynin: he complained often of the Soviets' tedious, obstinate negotiating style. "Dobrynin's skill at putting his American interlocutor on the defensive was infinite," Kissinger complained in his memoirs.<sup>98</sup> Despite seeing many common interests between the two superpowers, he recognized many areas where interests diverged and remained suspicious of the Soviet leadership. He could be quick to read Soviet actions as threats and was often confrontational in reaction—in part because the relationship with Dobrynin included a strong current of rivalry. Kissinger's deep-rooted insecurity could not but affect his feelings of amour-propre where Dobrynin was concerned, and at times his reactions to Soviet moves (or to perceived Soviet intentions) almost certainly were underpinned in part by a desire to appear tough to his friend.

Yet both men gained significant professional benefits from the relationship and colluded together to protect and advance those benefits; they also genuinely liked their interactions. Kissinger had good working relationships and friendships with some counterparts, including other backchannels from which he derived benefits, such as with West Germany's Egon Bahr. But the only channel that combined personal chemistry and the representative of a superpower was the one with Anatolyi. Quite simply, Kissinger *liked* talking to Anatolyi. Kissinger's predilection for seeing the road to solving the world's problems as going through Moscow was not merely an intellectual predisposition. How much more pleasing and gratifying it was to pick up the phone—it did not even need to be dialed—and deal with his familiar, soothing Ukrainian friend, instead of the "fatiguing" and "irritating" representatives of key U.S. allies, with whom he often had testy relations.<sup>99</sup> How much more easier it was to talk to "Anatol" than to the difficult, often "insolent" representatives of other adversaries: "the madmen in the Middle East," the "hysterical" Egyptians, or worst of all, the "tawdry, filthy shits"—the North Vietnamese.<sup>100</sup>

97. Quoted in Horne, *Kissinger*, 137.

98. Kissinger, *White House Years*, 544.

99. The adjectives are Horne's; Horne, *Kissinger*, 107.

100. Telcon, Kissinger/Dobrynin, October 24, 1973, and Telcon, Kissinger/Dobrynin, December 5, 1973, DNSA Kissinger Telcons; Nixon, *RN*, 733.

Henry's preference for Anatol helps explain his approach to settling the Vietnam War. In Kissinger's view, Vietnam was an irritant that complicated what mattered: relations among the great powers.<sup>101</sup> Compare his affection for Dobrynin with his attitude toward the North Vietnamese. Le Duc Tho did not flatter Kissinger; on the contrary, Tho did not regard Kissinger even as an equal. Kissinger recalled with evident distaste that at their first meeting "Tho greeted me in the aloofly polite manner of someone whose superiority is so self-evident that he cannot derogate from it by a show of politeness approaching condescension."<sup>102</sup> The North Vietnamese were "very dogmatic, very unpleasant, without much of a sense of humor."<sup>103</sup> Kissinger described their negotiating style as giving a series of ultimatums.<sup>104</sup> He described Tho as "arrogant," "monomaniacal," and "not amenable to ordinary mortal intercourse"; for Tho, negotiations were just "another battle." Tho was "peremptory," gave "tiresome" lectures, and sometimes snickered at Kissinger's jokes.<sup>105</sup> It is not surprising that Kissinger repeatedly appealed to Moscow and hoped that his bond with Dobrynin, symbolic of congruent interests between the two superpowers, would translate into assistance in getting the United States out of the war.<sup>106</sup> His friendship with Dobrynin and his dislike of Tho—and South Vietnam's Nguyen Van Thieu—naturally led Kissinger to prefer dealing with Moscow. At the end of 1972, Kissinger spent more time getting Moscow's backing for the outcome than he spent winning Thieu's support, resulting in the fiasco of Thieu's refusal to accept the proposed accord.<sup>107</sup>

More generally, the ease of his relationship with Dobrynin predisposed him to try to use the channel whenever unpleasant or messy problems arose, even when more sober "calculations" showed that more direct routes would have been more effective. The channel, worn into a smooth, deep groove through steady use, produced what political scientist Ted Hopf has called "the logic of habit": in long-term cooperative relationships, amity becomes routine. Habit, not deliberate calculation, begins to govern decision making. The wishful

101. Hanhimäki, *Flawed Architect*, 258.

102. Kissinger, *White House Years*, 442.

103. Vernon Walters in *The Nixon Presidency: An Oral History of the Era*, ed. Deborah Hart Strober and Gerald S. Strober (Washington, DC, 2003), 178.

104. *SAR*, 694.

105. Kissinger, *White House Years*, 441–42; Henry Kissinger, *Ending the Vietnam War: A Personal History of America's Involvement in and Extrication from the Vietnam War* (New York, 2002), 114; Kissinger, *White House Years*, 446.

106. Nixon, too, thought that "linkage" could induce the Soviets to pressure their North Vietnamese allies. But his assessment of the prospects for Soviet help—not colored by a deep personal relationship—was often less optimistic than Kissinger's. Fretting over whether Henry was being tough even during his April 1972 trip to Moscow, when Kissinger was supposed to pressure the Soviets for help on Vietnam, Nixon told Al Haig, "Henry better understand that Brezhnev is playing the typical sickening game. He is being taken in. We have got to stiffen him up. . . . Henry is so easily taken in by flattery." Haig Telcon, April 21, 1972, Doc. 137, in *FRUS* 16.

107. Hanhimäki, *Flawed Architect*, 246–48.

clinging to a bipolar framework cannot be properly understood without taking into account “habit’s power to perpetuate the status quo.”<sup>108</sup>

When war broke out in the Middle East in October 1973, Kissinger’s approach to the conflict centered on the Soviets. As Alistair Horne writes, détente mattered “more than the carnage to the respective client states of the region, or their mutual security—more too than the subsequent oil threat to Western economies.”<sup>109</sup> When Sisco awoke him in the early hours of October 6 to report that Israel was expecting an imminent attack, the first person Kissinger called was not a representative of the ostensible attackers, Egypt and Syria, but Dobrynin. “It is very important for our relationship that we do not have an explosion in the Middle East right now,” Kissinger told him. He returned to this theme in the more than half a dozen subsequent conversations he had with Dobrynin that day, telling him later that morning that the situation should “not be used to destroy everything that it has taken us three years to build up.” Dobrynin had been planning a short vacation; Kissinger was relieved that he cancelled it. “The reason I am hopeful we will settle it is that you did not leave town.” For Kissinger, the crisis was above all a test of détente. “If you and we could find a way of settling this now, then it would be an overwhelming argument in [favor of] all the things that we have been going through [regarding détente] as to what the practical consequences have been of our relationship.”<sup>110</sup> A week later, Kissinger told Dobrynin, “My whole strategy [has been] based on reliance on you” and their “special relationship.”<sup>111</sup>

Kissinger’s astonishing push, in what Elizabeth Drew called “Strangelove Day,” to put U.S. military forces on DEFCON III late in the evening of October 24 is best understood as an emotional response to a misunderstanding with Dobrynin.<sup>112</sup> (Nixon, beset by Watergate, was not involved in the decision.) The Israelis had continued to press their military advantage—with Kissinger’s encouragement—despite a cease-fire Kissinger had negotiated in Moscow. Angry at the continuing Israeli violations, Brezhnev proposed a joint U.S.-Soviet peacekeeping force. Kissinger assured Dobrynin that the United States was genuinely reining in the Israelis and warned him at least twice that he would regard as a “confrontation” any move to introduce Soviet troops into the Middle East. “It would be that from the closest cooperation we turn to a very dangerous course,” Kissinger told Dobrynin at 8:25 that evening.<sup>113</sup> Appearing almost hurt,

108. Ted Hopf, “The Logic of Habit in International Relations,” *European Journal of International Relations* 16 (2010), 540.

109. Horne, *Kissinger*, 230.

110. Henry Kissinger, *Crisis: The Anatomy of Two Major Foreign Policy Crises* (New York, 2003), 70.

111. Telcon, Kissinger/Dobrynin, October 13, 1973, DNSA Kissinger Telcons.

112. “Strangelove Day” appears in Raymond L. Garthoff, *Détente and Confrontation: American-Soviet Relations from Nixon to Reagan* (Washington, DC, 1994), 425. For a brief survey of scholarly assessments of the DEFCON III alert, see Horne, *Kissinger*, 310–13.

113. The relevant telcons appear in Kissinger, *Crisis*, 337, 340–41. On Kissinger’s encouragement to the Israelis, see Hanhimäki, *Flawed Architect*, 312–14.

Kissinger later recalled that Dobrynin was “all business,” not “congenial,” and spoke “coldly and matter-of-factly” during these exchanges.<sup>114</sup> Worse was to come. At 9:35 Dobrynin called with a message from Brezhnev, which reiterated the proposal that joint Soviet-U.S. military forces implement the cease-fire. It went on to say that if the United States did not act jointly, the USSR would “consider the question of taking appropriate steps unilaterally.” In Kissinger’s overheated assessment, it was “in effect an ultimatum” and “one of the most serious challenges to an American President by a Soviet leader.”<sup>115</sup> Kissinger, as he put it himself, “[went] into orbit.”<sup>116</sup> (“I take threats very badly,” he told Dobrynin the next day.)<sup>117</sup>

Kissinger’s response to the “ultimatum”—the DEFCON III alert—was not simply “an excessively dramatic maneuver . . . for diplomatic leverage in the region,” as historian Raymond Garthoff calls it.<sup>118</sup> It was an angry move triggered in part by a sense of outrage at what seemed like a Soviet betrayal of the cooperative relationship he had worked so hard to build. It appeared to him that, far from taking seriously his warnings not to move toward “confrontation” over a joint force, the Soviets had snubbed him and threatened to introduce troops unilaterally. Refusing to speak to his Soviet friend himself, he had Brent Scowcroft call Dobrynin to say that unilateral action “would have the most serious consequences.” Dobrynin, Kissinger wrote later, “made no comment except that he would transmit our message to Moscow. No reassurance; no claim of having been misunderstood; no suggestion that at midnight we all go to bed and resume our discussions in the morning because there was no intended threat.”<sup>119</sup> In fact Dobrynin simply did not grasp that Kissinger had misinterpreted Brezhnev’s message—nor did the Politburo, whose members, when they first learned of DEFCON III, did not connect it to Brezhnev’s message. “What has this to do with the letter I sent to Nixon?” asked Brezhnev, who thought his note had clearly underlined his desire to secure *joint* Soviet-American action.<sup>120</sup>

Two days later, an upset and angry Dobrynin asked Haig why Kissinger had created an “artificial crisis” instead of simply calling him before escalating. “We are [constantly] in touch with Henry on all the matters, big and small. . . . Every hour on the hour. But what happened in the night [of October 24–25]? . . . The usual procedure is through the confidential channel. . . . It’s the easiest way—just to call and say to Ambassador: Look here, the President feels very strongly so if you are really going to persist[,] sorry [ . . . ] but we will be forced to do it.

114. Kissinger, *Years of Upheaval*, 582.

115. *Ibid.*, 583–84.

116. Telcon, Kissinger/Dobrynin, October 25, 1973, 2:40 p.m., in DNSA Kissinger Telcons.

117. Quoted in Kissinger, *Crisis*, 361.

118. Garthoff, *Détente and Confrontation*, 430.

119. Kissinger, *Crisis*, 351–53.

120. Victor Israelyan, *Inside the Kremlin During the Yom Kippur War* (University Park, PA, 1995), 179–80.

Then I will be in touch with Moscow; Brezhnev will answer and then it's natural." He was mystified by the U.S. reaction: "for me, it looks really [as though] it was not real. Because if you really were concerned [about unilateral military action by the Soviet Union], I am sure you will first be in touch with Brezhnev to find out what's going on, if it's real."<sup>121</sup>

Three days later, in a phone call to Dobrynin, Kissinger admitted his blunder. In the transcript of a conversation tellingly omitted from the compilation of telcons he published in *Crisis*, Kissinger brought up the military alert. The conversation was extremely revealing about his real motives.

K: We had the impression that you were planning a military move. We did not invent this. Someday soon we have to discuss this. We had no reason to meet until 4:00 in the morning [a reference to the meeting that decided on the DEFCON III alert].

D: This is the point. On this, I think, one thing was really a big blunder on your [side], maybe it was deliberate.

Dobrynin repeated what he had told Haig: that if Kissinger had simply told Dobrynin that he was contemplating an alert, the crisis could have been averted. Kissinger agreed: "That was a blunder."

K: Whether you ever believe it or not it is not important now. I am telling you it was not . . . we were convinced you were planning something unilateral. We were as out[rage]d. We thought the tone in that letter. . . . We very truly thought you were threatening us.

He had warned Dobrynin, he said, not to "pressure" the United States or do anything "unilateral." He had been "very tough" before Brezhnev's message arrived, and Dobrynin ought to have assured him that the Soviets had no intention of taking unilateral action. Dobrynin repeated that Kissinger could simply have asked for more information, and chastised Kissinger for not informing the Soviets of the military alert but instead letting them find out through their own intelligence.

K: Too much is at stake for us to be angry with each other. Let's not have it fester. As a friend—

D: For two days I was mad. I know that anger in Moscow is still very high. [ . . . ]

K: We are in a difficult period between the two of us now. If you had no intention of acting unilaterally our letter was a mistake. I should have warned you but I was outraged.<sup>122</sup>

Human behavior is complex, and the explanation for Kissinger's jumping to an ill-founded conclusion about Soviet intentions cannot be reduced to a single

<sup>121</sup>. Quoted in Kissinger, *Crisis*, 385.

<sup>122</sup>. Telcon, Kissinger/Dobrynin, October 27, 1973, in DNSA Kissinger Telcons.

cause. Nixon was being engulfed by the Watergate scandal, and Kissinger's acute awareness of the weakness of the presidency played a role in his thinking. "I don't think [the Soviets] would have taken on a functioning President. . . . [The Soviets] find a cripple facing impeachment and why shouldn't they go in [to the Middle East]," he said on October 24.<sup>123</sup> But the evidence suggests that his anger at Dobrynin, who for once was not "slobbering," and his feelings of disappointment and betrayal by the Soviets, whom he had counted on for cooperation rather than confrontation, played a crucial role in his dangerous overreaction. In this instance the backchannel had helped create, rather than contain, a crisis.

To imply that Kissinger pursued relations with the Soviet Union entirely uninfluenced by personal feelings stemming from his partnership with Dobrynin is, at its core, to suggest that Kissinger was not human. No relationship of such duration and intensity could have left its participants emotionally unaffected. Kissinger's intimate connection with the Soviet ambassador mattered in different ways at different times, reinforcing his bipolar view of the world and influencing his responses to particular issues and events. More generally, Kissinger's emotions—his intense, consuming jealousy of Rogers, his anger at perceived challenges, and his fear of humiliation, among others—were profoundly important. Emotion influenced Kissinger's choices because all choices are influenced by emotion. The difficult task is to show which emotions mattered and how they operated in conjunction with which cognitive processes. The field of international history has long recognized the role of perceptions, ideology, cultural norms, and other intangibles in decision making. But in the choices, beliefs, and actions of policymakers, feelings also matter. Taking them into account is, after all, only realistic.

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123. Kissinger, *Crisis*, 345.