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REVIEW OF KISSINGER'S THE TROUBLED PARTNERSHIP:  
A RE-APPRAISAL OF THE ATLANTIC ALLIANCE

Bernard Brodie

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REVIEW OF KISSINGER'S THE TROUBLED PARTNERSHIP:  
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THE TROUBLED PARTNERSHIP: A RE-APPRAISAL  
OF THE ATLANTIC ALLIANCE  
Henry A. Kissinger  
McGraw-Hill, 1965, \$5.95

This is Henry Kissinger's best book thus far. It is an exceedingly good one. Certainly it is the best book I know of on the subject of its title, and the only American book of recent years that I would put on a par with some of the best work of France's Raymond Aron, and that is high praise indeed.

In format it does not bear too conspicuously the trappings of formal scholarship, but is rather a work of contemporary reportage. However, it is reporting on the very highest level. Kissinger's quotations and footnotes

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are more concerned with what statesmen have said and done than what colleagues in his profession have concluded (though the latter are not altogether neglected), but this could after all reflect mostly the originality and incisiveness of his own thoughts as contrasted with the lack of these qualities among most others in his field.

In what field? Is it international politics or is it strategy? Kissinger is one of the few writers presently on the scene in international politics who can effectively straddle both. In a review-article written nearly two years ago in the Times (London) Literary Supplement, the then Times reporter on defense affairs (Alun Gwynne Jones, now Lord Chalfont, Labour Minister for Disarmament) ruminated on the representatives of that amazing new breed of American civilian strategists who seemed to be developing the new and significant ideas in the field of modern military strategy, and who were obviously influencing -- and in some instances guiding -- official American strategy. The author made an interesting distinction between strategy as a form of conceptual analysis, which he considered "reasonably easy to define," and that which he considered to be represented by Kissinger, who was one of two he singled out as placing the emphasis on the political elements of strategy.<sup>1</sup> It struck me at the time that Chalfont was putting the approach to strategy via politics on a somewhat lower level of value, as though it detracted from the development of what ought to be a science of

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<sup>1</sup>The other person happened to be myself, which I may perhaps be pardoned for mentioning on the ground that it exposes to the reader where my bias may lie.

strategy. If that was really his feeling, I might say that it would not have been shared by Clausewitz, whose most enduring contribution to strategic thinking has certainly been his insistence on the dominance of the political aim and indeed of political control in the determination of all important strategic issues. The fact that most military people after his time, including those who professed to be guided by him, were of a different opinion is not remarkable. It argues only that they had never studied Clausewitz. And who has?

What we have learned today, twenty years after the advent of the nuclear bomb, is that politics is as never before the basic stuff of strategy, especially nuclear and even more clearly "pre-nuclear" strategy. It presents us, either in reality or in our minds, with all our dares and dare-nots -- with the whys and wheres and hows. Or as Kissinger himself puts it in this book: "In the past the major problem for strategists was to assemble superior strength; in the contemporary period the problem more frequently is how to make the available power relevant to objectives likely to be in dispute."

The new science of cost-effectiveness analysis, which results mostly from a wedding of technology with economics, may tell us that a certain type of nuclear weapon would provide a much more economical way of destroying a bridge in Northern Vietnam than would use of conventional or "iron" bombs -- as well as many other things not nearly so obvious -- but it is the political considerations that hold us to the iron bombs and that indeed call into challenge the advisability of the whole operation. Comparable

examples could be multiplied indefinitely, but it is surely clear that there is no need for them.

It is mostly for these reasons, no doubt, that there is less space and consideration given in this book to purely strategic considerations than in some of Kissinger's earlier works -- certainly far less than in the one that made him famous.<sup>2</sup> Anyway, Part Three of the book, which comprises only three chapters, is assigned to "the strategic issues," and of these only Chapter Four, called "The Nature of the Strategic Debate" (the title recalls Aron's recent The Great Debate) really has much to do with the strictly military side of the problem. It is an excellent chapter, and it is sufficient.

The book is about the Atlantic Alliance, or NATO, and what troubles this "troubled partnership" are for the most part not questions of strategy at all, though many of them can hide too easily behind the pretense of being so. Incidentally, of those same three chapters supposed to be on strategic issues, Chapter Five deals with the proposed multilateral force (MLF), which is from beginning to end a political and not a strategic issue. I should add that Kissinger's chapter on the MLF is in my opinion far and away the best summary and statement of the complicated issues in this fantastic story that I have yet read. In view of the large volume of literature that this particular debate has churned up, this too is saying a great deal.

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<sup>2</sup>Nuclear Weapons and Foreign Policy, Harper & Bros., 1957.

Of the total of eight chapters in the book, there is only one concerning which I feel any substantial reservations. This is Chapter Two, which is on the subject of Franco-American relations, particularly with respect to President de Gaulle's role in them. I have considerable sympathy with most of Kissinger's views and insights even in this chapter, finding myself much oftener in agreement than not, but his apologia for De Gaulle does seem to me to go a bit too far. Kissinger might have a point in his insistence that De Gaulle's attacks on the United States are more motivated by his interest in bucking up French morale after the long years of defeat than by other considerations, but we have plenty of evidence (underlined by the work of Nathan Leites and others) that the French population, as distinct from a very few nationalist personages within it, are not only in no need of such bucking up but really do not respond to it. They are interested in other things, mostly their prosperity; and while it no doubt gives most of them more pleasure than pain to see their president periodically kicking Uncle Sam, there are plenty of reservations in France even about that. Raymond Cartier in a recent article in Paris-Match, refers to what he calls Kissinger's "psychoanalytic" defense of the General, but he seems to be shaking his head sadly in disagreement.

On the subject of the problems of Germany, however, and of the other members of the Alliance, and especially of their dissatisfaction with the Alliance as it now stands, Kissinger is superb. No doubt something is owing to his background, which assists him in achieving appropriate intellectual detachment and also makes him entirely



at home in the German tongue. With these goes a reputation in Europe, especially as one closest to the highest councils of the United States and yet detached from and critical of their views, that undoubtedly gives him access under conditions of relative candor to all the important personages of Europe.

Others, however, may enjoy a comparable access and even linguistic skill, but few others have the remaining necessary equipment. There is simply no substitute for insight, perception, sensitivity, and what simply has to be called a "political sense." These Kissinger has in abundance, and in this field the combination is rare. It is really hard to understand why they should be so rare. So many articulate people study international politics; so few of them grasp so well its essence -- especially where issues of military significance are involved. The latter is indeed a most complicating factor, and Kissinger no doubt owes something to pure luck that he happened at the beginning of his academic career to turn his attention seriously and deeply to military problems. With his knowledge of military affairs goes, however, an even rarer thing, a sense for the implications of power -- its potentialities and its limitations. He can speak of military force and its use without inducing a reviewer to remark, as one British reviewer once did in reviewing, on the whole favorably, Herman Kahn's Thinking about the Unthinkable: "One sometimes wonders what has happened to Mr. Kahn's sense of anguish."

The number of quotable passages in this book is legion. I refrain from quoting more of them for several reasons, but mostly because the choice among them would be too difficult and their insertion would add considerably to the bulk of

this review. Anyway, let the reader of this review read the book for himself. It will be worth his while.<sup>3</sup>

Finally I should like to say that in this book Kissinger has achieved a clarity and a terseness of style that he has not possessed in the past. He has always been capable now and then of turning a very good phrase, but with it went a lot of plain turgid writing. The latter he has now sloughed off, and he emerges as no mean stylist, certainly as one of the most readable as well as insightful of the American commentators on the international scene.

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<sup>3</sup>However, I may perhaps be excused for quoting only the following, because it reflects Kissinger's talent for observation and for getting around. It is not the kind of insight one picks up merely in reading:

Faced with a ravaged Europe, the United States came to deal with its Allies paternalistically. This has involved a certain self-righteousness and impatience with criticism. American policy-makers often act as if disagreement with their views is due to ignorance which must be overcome by extensive briefings and insistent reiteration. They are less inclined to inquire whether there may be some merit in an opposing view than in overwhelming it with floods of emissaries, official and semi-official. As a result, the United States and Europe have too often conducted their dialogue over the technical implementation of a blueprint manufactured in America.