The Price of Peace: Henry Kissinger, President Nixon, & the Cold War

Thesis Proposal (1-5)

Layman's Summary (6-7)

Bibliography (8)

Campbell O'Blenes

History 4797: Davenport Honors Seminar

Professor Peter Thorsheim

October 20, 2014
Thesis Proposal

Throughout the Cold War both belligerents, the United States and the Soviet Union engaged each other without engaging each other by entering what would be later known as "proxy wars." This form of conflict goes against the traditional state versus state warfare which was seen in the World Wars prior to the Cold War. Knowing this, it makes defining the later part of the twentieth century extremely difficult because the ulterior motives of both respective states have a lot to do with their engagement. For example: it is known that the Allies invaded Normandy, France in June of 1944 strictly to gain a spearhead for their European campaign; there is not a substantive ulterior motive to say otherwise, and the goals of both sides are clearly stated: offence and defense. On the other hand if one were to study why the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan in the 1980's or why the United States engaged the North Vietnamese, it is rather unclear what each side was hoping to gain. Politicians, as always, have goals which supersede their promise to uphold the wishes of their constituency, and these goals are going to greatly aide in my thesis development. My thesis will focus on Henry Kissinger and the fact that he won a Nobel Peace prize despite countless acts that would normally place someone in the Hague for war crimes. Overthrowing countless democratically elected governments, displacing millions of people by instigating regional instability, and using the veil of the Cold War to propagate American business abroad are a few of the cases that my paper will outline.

In order to properly introduce how historians have studied this topic, which many have, a basic understanding of the circumstances Henry Kissinger acted in is a necessity. From the earliest eve of the Cold War it was obvious how the rest of the twentieth century would play out: two sides pitted against each other (Warsaw Pact and NATO) whom both will attempt to coerce
non-players to their side—such as the less developed world. The United States created the Marshall Plan, formally the European Recovery Program, as a deterrent for socialism in war-torn Europe. The United States and her allies knew of the dangers of a poor economy in states near the new Soviet Union, and they were committed to stopping the spread of communism at all costs. The Marshall Plan was responsible for a huge success across war-torn Europe, and the United States saw a decent return on their investment as now a new market was flourishing for American products.

The Marshall Plan was the beginning of an era of proxy-intervention—actions that do not directly involve one state against another, but are still calculated and deliberate operations to undermine the other’s influence. Even when Richard M. Nixon took the office of US President in January of 1969, the United States and the Soviet Union were still pitted against each other in a similar fashion. After the Korean War, a new type of proxy-intervention was born: the ground war. Either belligerent, the United States or the USSR, would support a regime that mirrored their respective social order. They would fervently defend that regime, typically in a less developed state, by spearheading large-scale military operations against the opposing social order but without direct engagement. President Nixon inherited the conflict in Vietnam, one of the proxy-wars that the United States would participate in against the spread of communism. Together President Nixon and Henry Kissinger, his appointed Secretary of State, would use the veil of protecting Democracy to endeavor grandiose strategies of an American world order.

Historians have researched the topic of Henry Kissinger’s involvement in war crimes as they unfolded, and even continue on to this day. William H. Chafe, a resident historian at Duke University, details many of the abuses of power emanating from the Nixon administration. Chafe introduces his research by pointing out that Nixon and Kissinger were opposites, and both men
spoke openly about their distaste for each other. That is until Nixon was elected president, when the two men realized that they needed each other equally in a symbiotic power relationship unlike any other. Henry Kissinger, in his time, was arguably the most influential foreign policy advisor in the United States. He worked with both the Kennedy and Johnson administration on international issues, and was a shoe-in for any latter President to appoint as a Secretary of State. Chafe points out that Richard Nixon was Kissinger's key to consolidating power in the White House and achieving grandiose international operations. Nixon was known for his stubborn and arrogant personality, something the American actually seemed to like considering their no-compromise attitude towards the Soviet Union. Kissinger knew Nixon's stubbornness would cause him to close the door on many of his cabinet members and advisors, only allowing certain people into his private circle.

William Chafe focuses heavily on the nefarious and sly personality of Kissinger, the qualities of a great statesmen. During the Humphrey v. Nixon campaign for President in 1968 Kissinger played to the tune of both men, in order to assure his ascension to power in either administration. Realizing that a Nixon administration would offer him greater access to power, Kissinger tipped off Nixon about an upcoming peace agreement between the North and South Vietnamese. Using the tip, Nixon contacted his right wing contacts in South Vietnam calling on them to denounce the agreement and claim that a Republican government in the US would be more "sympathetic" to their war aims. This destroyed Humphrey's campaign because the American public wanted to see a South Vietnamese government which aligned well with their own.

Dr. Asaf Siniver, a professor at the University of Birmingham United Kingdom, approaches the study of the Nixon-Kissinger relationship by examining their goals and how the
two men subverted internal and foreign procedure to achieve those goals. Using the bombing and invasion of Cambodia in the Spring of 1970 as evidence, Dr. Sinatra points out that Nixon had an idea of what plans would amount to the best overall results. Without regard for any of his advisors, despite their expertise, Nixon acted on what he felt was the best course of action. On many accounts, Nixon's military advisors pleaded with him to not bomb sites in Cambodian territory and abhorred the idea of committing ground troops to the area. They claimed that an already uneasy public would react fervently to such an escalation and obvious violation of international law. Although hindsight can show that Nixon's advisors were almost completely right, at the time the President believed he could commit whatever military assets he pleased—as long as he could hide it from the American public.

My research question is as follows: why were Henry Kissinger's actions seen as necessary and important to the stability of the world, while millions of people were killed without Kissinger ever seeing trial for war-crimes? Is it simply the fact that the United States 'won' the Cold War, so his atrocities are buried under Western-centric history—or rather that his strategies were well guised by the fear of communism? My approach to these questions will be to study and juxtapose the viewpoints of both sides involved during any event that incurred Kissinger's involvement. For example, I have looked at transgressions between Ho Chi Min, the leader of North Vietnam during the Vietnam conflict, and President Nixon. The two leaders speak very openly about the crimes against the Vietnamese people, and Nixon displays an unfledged ignorance to the issue. This is just one example of many, but can help to explain my approach to this research. I want to understand both sides of most events my paper will focus on, as to not exclude pertinent information.
Traditionally history has taken on a Eurocentric approach, instead of unbiased documentation and research. This is displayed beautifully in American education curriculums even to this day; the dark ages in Europe is the extent students study that era, although many Arab countries had great political institutions and social orders at this time. Even when students look at the ancient world they are taught through a predominantly Christian euro-bias: the Greeks were the greatest ancient civilization and the Persians were the antagonists. My approach will stray far from any Western-bias, and will metaphorically sit Henry Kissinger and Richard Nixon in the Hague for war crimes. I will not look to defend one side or the other, but rather study the issues at hand and deliver the closest thing to the truth as humanly possible.
Bibliography

Primary


Secondary


