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Bölcsészettudományi Kar

ALAPSZAKOS SZAKDOLGOZAT

Realpolitik Amerikában: Henry Kissinger külpolitikája 1969 és 1973 között

Realpolitik in America: Foreign Affairs by Henry Kissinger between 1969 and 1973

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Budapest, 2020.04.20.

Hauer Róbert Tamás s.k.

a szakdolgozat szerzőjének aláírása

Abstract

The topic of this thesis will be an analysis and interpretation of the three most determining events in foreign policy of the first Nixon Administration. The paper will introduce the political theory of *Realpolitik*, and explain its development from its German origin to the practical utilization in American politics. Further analysis will emphasize Henry Kissinger's intellectual contribution to foreign affairs during President Richard Nixon's first term. The thesis will focus on the political and diplomatic process behind the arms limitation talks between the United States of America and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, the back channel negotiations between the United States of America and the People's Republic of China, and the secret diplomatic and military strategy that lead to the ending of the war between the United States of America and the Democratic Republic of Vietnam. As a method, the different patterns of foreign policy between previous U.S. governments and the first Nixon Administration will be studied through comparison. As the source of the analysis, academic and scholarly publications will be used from the field of political science and history.

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I. Introduction

The distance between the New World and the major European powers granted an exceptional position to the United States of America for almost two hundred years from its foundation. In the twentieth century, however, the USA became the dominant power of the Western Civilization, and it was no longer possible to pursue its isolationist policy. After the Second World War, the major threat to the country and its allies was the aggressive expansion of communism. Moreover, the nation struggled with domestic challenges as the Civil Rights Movement reshaped the structure of its society. Despite all the problems America faced in the nineteen-sixties and nineteen-seventies, an unlikely alliance between a son of a Californian farmer and a holocaust survivor immigrant could create one of the most efficient foreign policy agenda for the United States in the twentieth century. Together, Richard Nixon and Henry Kissinger finished the Vietnam War, opened to China and eased the pressure of the Cold War between the USA and the Soviet Union.

The aim of this essay is to prove that the practice of *Realpolitik* achieved relevant success in American foreign affairs during the first term of President Richard Nixon. The second section will be a disclaimer. The third section will introduce the evolution of the political theory of *Realpolitik* from its German origin into its American realization in practical politics. The fourth section will present Henry Kissinger's *détente* policy which softened the tension between the USA and the USSR. The fifth section will examine the back channel diplomacy between the United States and the People's Republic of China which lead to the reestablishment of diplomatic relations between the two nations. The sixth section will discuss the American military involvement in Southeast Asia and the process which concluded into the ending of the Vietnam War. Lastly, the seventh section will summarize what the previous parts of the thesis stated.

II. Disclaimer

This thesis presents the most relevant successes of the first Nixon Administration's foreign policy, however it does not discuss the domestic context in its full complexity, and less determining events in foreign affairs are also omitted.

III. *Realpolitik*

According to the Encyclopedia Britannica *Realpolitik* is "politics based on practical objectives rather than on ideals. The word does not mean "real" in the English sense but rather connotes "things"—hence a politics of adaption to things as they are. Realpolitik thus suggests a pragmatic, no-nonsense view and a disregard for ethical considerations" (Realpolitik). This description is the commonly accepted definition today that reflects the Machiavellian interpretation of this political concept. The Florentine philosopher and diplomat, Niccolò Machiavelli in his famous work, The Prince, described the necessary behavior for a responsible leader who must always approach matters of the state without moral concerns as the interest of the state is the sole thing that has real relevance. In this concept, there are no values beyond the common good of a nation and methods are secondary considerations (Machiavelli 40).

a. The origins of *Realpolitik*

Despite the general assumption that *Realpolitik* originates from the Renaissance era, it is a relatively new political school of thought that was created in the mid-nineteenth century German Confederation. The term was first introduced in 1853, when Ludwig August von Rochau published his work: Foundations of Realpolitik, applied to the current state of Germany (Bew 31). His book reflected on the political atmosphere of Germany when the influence of liberalism and nationalism emerged at the same time. German intellectuals attempted to establish balance between the

interests of the reactionary ruling class, the emerging bourgeoisie, and the awakening proletariat. Rochau meant to create a solution for domestic issues mostly, though foreign affairs also applied as a relevant factor. The question of unification was the main concern for political thinkers in Prussia, Austria, and all the thirty-nine states of the German Confederation, however, there were different approaches to this end. On one side were the liberals and radicals, such as Rochau, who imagined an economically developed and democratic nation-state which would adopt the achievements of the Enlightenment and erase the monarchical form of rule. On the other side was the traditional ruling class and its principal agent, the Prussian minister-president, Otto von Bismarck whose goal was to create a strong empire lead by Prussia. Despite all of his revulsions, Rochau was able to compromise and support the efforts of Bismarck and his method of "iron and blood" to create social stability in a unified Germany (Bew 20-22).

John Bew argues that Rochau's *Realpolitik* was not a coherent and developed concept: "It contained an uneven mix of German, French, and English political philosophy and sociology and does not fit easily with the main intellectual traditions of the nineteenth century: liberalism, conservativism, socialism, or Marxism. If anything, it borrowed elements from each" (22). Yet, Rochau created a political school of thoughts which later became the foundation of a comprehensive ideology and practical politics for conservative politicians with realistic worldview. John Bew summarized the principles of *Realpolitik* in four points:

- power is essential behind any politics, without power even the noblest ideology is determined to fail,
- cooperation between the different layers of society is necessary in order to achieve efficient governance,

- ideology is secondary compared to practical considerations, and it only matters, if the majority of society supports it,
- government cannot avoid paying attention to the public opinion, successful politics cannot exist permanently against the will of the people (32).

b. The appearance of *Realpolitik* in Anglo-American politics

At the turn of the twentieth century, every major European powers' foreign policy followed the patterns of *Realpolitik*, although they always covered their actions with moral reasons. Britain was in the most delicate position as it was not creating an empire, but already possessed the largest existing one. At the same time, it tried to uphold the balance of power in Europe. British governments with different ideological backgrounds maneuvered the empire through a very narrow path during the nineteenth century. In spite of their disagreements on domestic issues, they all agreed on the basic foreign interests of Britain. Relying on the maritime dominance of the Royal Navy, they eliminated all the enemies of the empire, extended its territories successfully, and maintained international trade (Bew 91-94). As Prime Minister Lord Palmerston said in his speech in the House of Commons in 1848: "We have no eternal allies, and we have no perpetual enemies. Our interests are eternal and perpetual, and those interests is our duty to follow".

Despite the deeply rooted isolationism and exceptionalism in the USA, more realistic concepts and geopolitical necessities shaped the American foreign policy from the beginning of the eighteenth century. In 1823, President James Monroe in his speech in the U.S. Congress drew an agenda that laid down the foundations of nationalist and imperialist tendencies in American foreign affairs. This initiative later became known as the Monroe Doctrine, and it proclaimed that the Western Hemisphere belonged to the United States' sphere of influence, and the USA would prevent any intervention of European powers in the future (Frank and Magyarics 150). Yet, foreign

policy remained a secondary consideration for the majority of American politicians until the nineteen-hundreds; foreign affairs meant territorial expansion in North-America and maintaining the business with neighbors mostly. At the beginning of the twentieth century, Theodore Roosevelt and Woodrow Wilson were the two presidents who realized that the United States could not avoid playing on the global stage anymore, although their discernments were based on different philosophies. Wilson's approach was more idealistic, he believed that America's mission was spreading freedom in the world. Wilson despised the traditional European diplomacy; instead of pursuing the balance of power, he imagined a liberal global order in which a universal agreement for peace among nations would have been the governing principle (Kissinger, "Diplomacy" 30). By comparison, Roosevelt observed the world in a more realistic way: geopolitics was in the center of his concepts. Although he never identified his agenda as some kind of American version of *Realpolitik*, yet it shared many of its attributions. It was more of an extension to the Monroe Doctrine, a new and uniquely un-American characteristic in foreign policy. Roosevelt consequently used military force as an instrument of diplomacy in order to expand the United States' influence on the global stage. (Bew 110). As Kissinger wrote about his governance: "No other president defined America's world role so completely in terms of national interest, or identified the national interest so comprehensively with the balance of power" (*Diplomacy* 39).

After the First World War, America returned to its isolationist past: the U.S. Senate did not share Wilson's dream about a global order, and rejected the country's entry into the League of Nations. However, the shocking reality of the Second World War dispelled the illusions of isolationism and made the country's involvement in the international system irrevocable. In 1969, when Richard Nixon took office, the Cold War was at its peak; the United States was deeply involved in a military conflict with the communist forces of North Vietnam, diplomatic ties were

dismantled with China since it has become communist state in 1949, and the tension between the USSR and the USA was amplifying after countries of the Warsaw Pact occupied Czechoslovakia in 1968. In this complex situation, President Nixon and his National Security Advisor, Henry Kissinger abandoned the well-tried and failed Cold War methods of American politics, and they utilized *Realpolitik* as a solution (Frank and Magyarics 411-412).

IV. Henry Kissinger's *Realpolitik*

As a child, Heinz Alfred Kissinger saw the dark side of humanity at first hand. He was only 15 when his family escaped from the Third Empire and resettled in the New World in 1938. Although Henry gratefully appreciated his new home's free society, he could never identify himself with the optimistic American attitude as the way of his thinking was shaped by the fear and humiliation that he experienced during his childhood. After military service, hunting for Nazis as an intelligence officer in occupied Germany, Kissinger enrolled at Harvard University in 1947. His major field of research was European philosophy, history, and politics, and in his theses he praised the European practitioners of political realism such as Klemens von Metternich or Otto von Bismarck. As a fresh Ph.D. graduate, Dr. Kissinger entered into the sphere of politics and became a member of a study group organized by the Council on Foreign Relations. Soon, he got the task to summarize a strategy on the possible usage of the American nuclear forces in his work, Nuclear Weapons and Foreign Policy. The future National Security Advisor and Secretary of State described that the foreign affairs of the United States was based on ideals instead of geopolitical realities, and the American public's expectation of solving international conflicts permanently was a false hope. He argued that the illusions of American idealism about the goodness of mankind replaced comprehensive strategy in international issues. During the nineteen-sixties, Kissinger contributed to the work of both the Kennedy and the Johnson Administration's national security

staff as an advisor. Though the greatest opportunity in his professional career occurred on November 25, 1968, when the request from President-elect Nixon arrived, and Kissinger got the power to orchestrate a new foreign policy for the United States of America (Schulzinger 9-23).

a. Nixinger

Richard Nixon and Henry Kissinger had an ambiguous relationship. Although they came from different backgrounds, the President and his National Security Advisor shared a common ground: foreign affairs. They observed the world through the same lens, rejected the role of ideology in foreign policy and followed a concept that was based on the realities of geopolitics and national interests. Hence Kissinger had more influence over the country's diplomacy than any other person in his position before. President Nixon granted him the power to create a framework in which the White House National Security Council staff became a more relevant and efficient actor in foreign affairs than the State Department. Information from every government agency went through the NSC, and Kissinger became the primary diplomat of the Nixon Administration. In most cases, Kissinger discussed issues with Nixon alone: they had private meetings almost every morning and made decisions together. Despite their cooperation, however, the trust between the President and his advisor was fragile. Eager to prove his loyalty to the President, Kissinger asked for the assistance of the FBI director—J. Edgar Hoover—to spy on his own NSC staff. Though Nixon could never really trust Kissinger as he belonged to the Ivy League intellectual elite that the President despised, he needed his expert's special ability in diplomacy (Schulzinger 29-41).

b. *Détente*

In 1969, when the Nixon Administration came to power, the United States' foreign policy was paralyzed, mostly by the country's commitment in Indochina. For Nixon and Kissinger,

however, the War in Vietnam was only one chess piece on the board. The containment strategy of the previous U.S. governments seemed to have failed, therefore the new administration turned to a different approach. Contrary to the advocates of containment, President Nixon did not expect from communist countries to change their internal political system as it was not a matter for the United States. Thus, respect for other major powers' sphere of influence and pursuit for peaceful coexistence replaced containment in foreign policy (Kissinger "Diplomacy" 705-712).

The example for reconciliation came from Europe, where French President Charles de Gaulle intended to ease the tension—*détente*—between the East and West part of Europe for the first time. In 1969, West German Chancellor Willy Brandt who arranged his country's relationship with East Germany, Poland, and the Soviet Union, was even more successful. As the architect of the new American approach, Kissinger observed the world in its complexity. He understood that the long-term security of the United States depended on global balance of power rather than one victory in a proxy war in the Third World. In 1972, after President Nixon's historic visit to the Soviet Union, Kissinger explained the simple reason behind *détente*: "We are compelled to coexist. We have an inescapable obligation to build jointly a structure for peace. Recognition of this reality is the beginning of wisdom for a sane and effective foreign policy today" (Briefing by the National Security Advisor). The concrete issue that led to the cooperation between the USA and the USSR was arms control. Formerly, the Johnson Administration proposed a motion for negotiations with the Soviets to reduce the number of nuclear weapons in both countries. Despite the oppositional voices from the U.S. Congress, Nixon and Kissinger realized the opportunity that this question offered in diplomacy, and the White House seized the issue. Excluding even the State Department, Kissinger established secret conversations with Soviet ambassador Anatoly Dobrynin. Their negotiations successfully prepared a state visit for Richard Nixon to Moscow, where the President

and General Secretary Leonid Brezhnev signed the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty, the agreement for the limitation of strategic arms (SALT-1), and the Basic Principles of U.S-Soviet Relations on May 26, 1972. The latter document declared both countries' equality in global affairs, and they mutually committed themselves to peaceful coexistence. Although neither Nixon nor Kissinger had the illusion that these agreements would prevent the recrudescence of conflicts between the two superpowers, they understood the importance of continuous dialogue. The fact that Soviet and American leaders were seated around the same table was more important than the actual content of any treaty. Furthermore, Kissinger was thinking in a more comprehensive geopolitical context in which diplomatic steps could be linked to each other, and separated issues could be merged into a coherent and successful foreign policy (Schulzinger 52-71).

V. Opening to China

While the United States and China were fighting together against the Axis Powers during the Second World War, the civil war within China was suspended between the communist and the nationalist forces. After Japan was defeated, the fight for the rule over China continued until 1949, when Mao Zedong proclaimed the establishment of the People's Republic of China. The United States refused to recognize this regime change and acknowledged the nationalist government, which relocated to Taiwan, as the legitimate leader of the country. Therefore the diplomatic relations between Washington and Beijing—Peking at the time—ended for the next twenty years (Kissinger "On China" 98).

a. Triangle Diplomacy

Even before they came to power and reshuffled American foreign affairs, both Nixon and Kissinger emphasized the necessity of escaping from the blind alley of containment strategy of the

last twenty years. They recognized the fact that communism was not a unified movement and it did not have a central headquarter that would orchestrate the steps of each nation. In spite of their common ideological basis, every single communist country had its own national interests; therefore disagreement between them was inevitable (Kissinger "Diplomacy" 719).

In the twenty years after 1949, the political landscape changed around China. Domestically, Mao's Cultural Revolution ensured his unquestionable leadership over the country, however he still felt threatened from outside, mostly from the Soviet Union. Beijing did not accept its subordinate position to Moscow, and it required independence in its own affairs. Besides the growing tension between the PRC and the USSR in the late nineteen-sixties, China also had a war with India in 1962. Moreover, North Vietnam considered its Northern neighbor more as a potential expansive empire than a close ally. Hence China was surrounded by suspicious and threatening neighbors, and Mao strived to strengthen the country's regional position; his notion just met the Nixon Administration's new approach to foreign affairs (Schulzinger 80-81).

Although several western countries established diplomatic relations with the PRC until 1969, the United States was holding its position that the only legitimate government of China was seated in Taiwan. The main reasons behind the standing rejection were the containment strategy of the previous administrations and the pressure from the hardliners of the Taiwan-lobby in Washington. Henry Kissinger, however, commenced the concept of the so-called Triangle Diplomacy as part of his *détente* policy, in which the United States utilized China's threatened situation in order to create an effective counterweight against Soviet expansionism. Naturally, this did not mean a military alliance, yet this solution was capable of radically changing the balance of power in Asia. At the same time, Washington also had the intention to send a clear signal to Hanoi that it cannot expect any help from its Northern comrades. In 1971, when both the PRC and the

USA accepted the geopolitical realities and their interdependence in the Asia-Pacific, they were ready to overstep the ideological gap between each other. (Kissinger "Diplomacy" 719-726).

b. Back channel diplomacy

The first signal for a possible shifting from the diplomatic deadlock came from Beijing when Chairman Mao invited an American journalist, Edgar Snow, in 1965. In an interview, Mao expressed his regret over the lack of diplomatic relations between the two nations and emphasized that China would not fight with the United States unless U.S. troops stepped on Chinese mainland territory. The Chairman clearly understood his country's vulnerable position in the shadow of a growing Soviet invasion, and he turned to traditional Chinese diplomacy as a solution which meant a firm stand against a direct threat and looking for alliance with the enemy's other enemy in the background at the same time. Besides, Beijing expected that in case of a Sino-Soviet war, the USA could not remain neutral as the predictable collapse of China would have meant the birth of Soviet superiority in the Asia-Pacific. Even though Mao's statement was not taken seriously by the Johnson Administration, he continued his strategy of cautious mitigation until a recipient partner recognized the same necessities (Kissinger "On China" 203-212).

Mao's calculation was correct, and the Nixon Administration intended to establish dialogue with the People's Republic of China. The two countries' interests met as they both considered Soviet expansionism the most serious threat to the global balance. However, American policy on China in the nineteen-sixties was built on the status quo of 1949, and official diplomatic channels did not exist. The radical change in this American attitude came in October 1969, after Soviet and Chinese troops engaged in a fight on their common border along the Ussuri River. As a reaction to this event, the Nixon Administration declared publicly, what no other American government

did before, that a communist country's survival was essential to preserve the global balance of power. Clearly, this was not a commitment to military intervention in case of a Sino-Soviet war, yet a warning to Moscow and a gesture to Beijing. Soon, in February 1970, American and Chinese diplomats could get in touch informally in Warsaw where the Americans suggested sending a high level representative of the U.S. government to Beijing. However, the fact that U.S. forces just invaded Cambodia did not facilitate the building of trust so the offer was rejected. The American attempt for direct dialogue with China continued through the capitals of Pakistan, Romania, and France, where Chinese diplomats were all informed about the American request. On December 8, 1970, the first positive answer came from Prime Minister Zhou Enlai which was delivered by the Pakistani ambassador to Henry Kissinger. Soon, the same message also arrived through Romania. In his letters, the Chinese Premier declared that the only relevant obstacle to overcome is the question of Taiwan where U.S. troops were stationed. Also, Zhou invited President Nixon for a state visit to Beijing. Although the issue of Taiwan was reasonable from Chinese perspective, yet the Americans rejected the offer as the consequence of a Presidential visit seemed unpredictable without appropriate preparations. In April 1971, after a few months of standstill, the next step of the Chinese leadership was a very unusual gesture which became known later as Ping-Pong Diplomacy. The opportunity occurred when both countries' table tennis teams attended an international tour in Japan. For Mao's explicit order, the Chinese Ping-Pong team invited the American team for a visit to Beijing where the Americans were guided around by Prime Minister Zhou Enlai in the Great Hall of the People on April 14, 1971. This act was a clear and public message from Beijing about the seriousness of its intentions. Still in April 1971, the Pakistani ambassador handed another message from Zhou Enlai in which the Premier repeated his invitation, and named the issue of Taiwan as the only question that really mattered to Beijing. Just as the

previous messages this letter was also kept hidden even within the Nixon Administration. Through the National Security Council, the President and Henry Kissinger coordinated the secret correspondence with the Chinese leadership directly while the State Department declared at several press conferences that the USA recognized Taipei as the seat of the government of China. In May 1971, President Nixon accepted the invitation with two conditions: there would not be any preliminary commitments from either side, and Henry Kissinger would secretly meet Zhou Enlai and prepare the Presidential visit (Kissinger "On China" 216-234).

c. "Only Nixon could go to China" (*Star Trek VI: The Undiscovered Country)*

The first Kissinger led delegation traveled to Beijing on July 9, 1971. Since confidentiality was essential for the successful outcome, the trip was concealed as an official visit to friendly countries in Asia, only the President and Kissinger's deputy knew the exact destination. Zhou Enlai as the host followed the patterns of traditional Chinese diplomacy, and he both wished to impress the American guests with generous hospitality and emphasize what was expected from them. The main Chinese goal was to become an equal partner to the United States in the international system and to strengthen the county's position against the Soviet Union. In order to achieve this, the USA had to acknowledge the One China Principle and withdraw its troops from Taiwan. Zhou understood the American request in exchange for such a gesture: Beijing had to abandon its ally, Hanoi. Naturally, Kissinger and Zhou could not undertake such commitments, but they grounded the foundations of a future strategic cooperation (Kissinger "On China" 236-250). After his trip was revealed by the White House, Kissinger became a celebrated politician at home. The mainstream press, including the Newsweek and Time, published praising articles about him and covered their title-pages with his picture. This sudden-came popularity of Kissinger induced the President's disapproval. He still appreciated his advisor's talent, but made it clear within the

administration that the task was not accomplished yet and his visit would complete the opening to China (Schulzinger 89-90).

Although Kissinger, the Secretary of State, William P. Rogers, and his wife, Pat Nixon, accompanied him on the historic state visit, President Nixon stepped on the tarmac alone at the Beijing International Airport on February 21, 1972. His handshake with Zhou Enlai was a great satisfaction for the Chinese Premier as this moment overwrote the insult that was committed by John Foster Dulles in 1954, when he rejected the same gesture in Geneva. However, the President's meeting with Chairman Mao was more like a pleasant conversation over tea than serious negotiation between statesmen. Mao quickly clarified to Nixon that details about concrete issues would be discussed with Premier Zhou. He also expressed his sympathy with Nixon and ensured him that the ideological differences were not important anymore as the two countries had shared interests (Kissinger "On China" 250-255).

The essence of the Presidential visit was embodied in the Shanghai Communiqué in which fundamental principles of the newly established relationship were declared. According to this document, both countries rejected hegemony in global affairs and highlighted the importance of a stable international order. Apparently, the aim of this statement was to target Soviet expansionism which threatened global stability. The other important part of the Shanghai Communiqué committed the United States to recognize the One China Principle, however, it was not declared in this document whether Beijing or Taipei was the legitimate government of China as this question got defined as a domestic issue of the Chinese people (Kissinger "On China" 270-271).

President Nixon's state visit was the beginning of a long-term dialogue between the United States and China, however, leaders of both countries understood that this relationship was fragile:

"The reward for Sino-American rapprochement would not be a state of perpetual friendship or a harmony of values, but a rebalancing of the global equilibrium that require constant tending…" (Kissinger "On China" 274).

VI. The Vietnam War

The war in Southeast Asia meant a new experience for the victorious American Spirit as the country was never defeated in any military engagement before. This conflict crushed the Americans' belief in their own exceptionalism; the Vietnam War made it evident that the United States was not as mighty as it was thought to be by its leaders and people. Geopolitics was an unavoidable and determining factor for every actor of the international stage, and the opportunities were not unlimited in the bipolar world (Kissinger, "Diplomacy" 621).

a. The path to the war

President Wilson placed a moral commitment for any coming administration in foreign affairs which made the United States a guardian for freedom movements everywhere on the globe. As Kissinger summarized: "America was obliged to fight for what was right, regardless of local circumstances, and independent of geopolitics" (*Diplomacy* 621). However, the conflict in Southeast Asia created a controversial situation for U.S. governments who had to face it. On one hand was the Wilsonian approach that was anti-colonialist and supported every independence movement. On the other hand, there was the so-called Domino Theory that assumed if one country would come under communist rule, other neighboring countries would follow in the line (Kissinger, "Diplomacy" 622-624). The complication from the American perspective was that the two principles collided in Vietnam: the nationalist insurgents, who had been fighting against the French colonial rule since 1945, were also communists. In 1954, France suffered a fatal defeat in

Indochina, and it was obligated to withdraw its troops from the region as the Geneva Accords ordained so. This agreement also decreed the separation of Vietnam into two parts along the 17th parallel. However, Ho Chi Minh, the communist leader of the northern Democratic Republic of Vietnam, proclaimed that this was the only legitimate government for the Vietnamese people. In the south, the Republic of Vietnam was also established. Its self-appointed leader, Ngo Dinh Diem governed his country no less hard-handed than his communist compatriot controlled North Vietnam (Frank and Magyarics 409-410).

The Vietnam War was in fact a civil war between two fractions of one nation in which the United States intervened. The containment strategy overwrote the moral considerations, and for that reason the Eisenhower Administration supported Diem's government with financial aid and non-combatant military assistance so as to ensure a stronghold against the further spreading of communism in the region. After the threatening experiences of the communist takeover of China in 1949 and the questionable outcome of the Korean War in 1953, President Eisenhower did not take the risk to let another domino fall in Asia. Thus, the United States supported an undemocratic regime against another one (Kissinger, "Diplomacy" 636-639).

b. Steps of escalation

When John F. Kennedy became President in 1961, the clash between the troops of the two Vietnams had been intensifying already. Eventually, four reasons led to the decision of deploying U.S. combat troops into Southeast Asia in 1962. First of all, Hanoi had been violating the Geneva Accords since 1959, as it sent 6000 soldiers into the neutral Laos to establish a secured supply route called the Ho Chi Minh Trail. Secondly, Cambodia's leader, Norodom Sihanouk wished to avoid an open conflict with North Vietnam; hence he did not interfere in the build-up of a network

of communist basements along the South Vietnamese border. Thirdly, the Kennedy Administration's intention to initiate a counter-revolution against Fidel Castro's regime in Cuba failed in 1961 when American troops and Cuban reactionaries were defeated by Castro's forces in the Bay of Pigs. And finally, the fourth reason was symbolic beyond its actual seriousness; the building of the Berlin Wall in 1961. These events proved to President Kennedy that negotiation with the communists was utterly meaningless without the support of military buildup (Kissinger "Diplomacy" 646-648).

In November 1963, the political landscape changed in South Vietnam and the United States as well. Ngo Dinh Diem was killed in a coup committed by his own generals. President Diem could never stabilize his rule, and he made even less effort to turn South Vietnam into a Western-style democracy. President Kennedy's enthusiasm about helping the Vietnamese to build a nation were decreasing, and Diem did not seem suitable to lead the country anymore. The newly appointed U.S. ambassador, Henry Cabot Lodge made it clear for the disgruntled military leaders in Saigon that the USA did not support Diem's government; thus they were allowed to act against him and take the power. Only a few weeks later, President Kennedy was assassinated in Dallas, and Lyndon B. Johnson became the 36th President of the United States (Kissinger "Diplomacy" 654-655).

In August 1964, the conflict reached a turning point. An American destroyer, the USS Maddox was attacked by North Vietnamese torpedo boats in the Tonkin Gulf. Although the incident was not interpreted as it happened actually, this event triggered relevant changes in the Johnson Administration's approach to the war. The U.S. Senate unanimously voted for the Tonkin Resolution which gave unprecedented power to the President in order to ensure the security of American persons and equipment in South Vietnam. Technically, this meant the large deployment

of American forces into the country, and their active engagement in combat with the Vietcong, which was a communist guerilla group in the South, and the Northern Vietnamese army. Moreover, the U.S. Air Force began Operation Rolling Thunder, a massive airstrike against North Vietnamese military targets. In the four years after 1964, the number of U.S. soldiers in Vietnam rose from 16000 to 535000 (Frank and Magyarics 410).

When President Johnson announced in 1968 that he would not run again for another term, the United States was already losing the war on two fronts. On the first hand, the government lost its domestic support, especially, after the Tet Offensive when Hanoi executed a surprise attack against South Vietnam during the Lunar New Year cease-fire. Although from a military perspective this attack was a failure for the communists, the USA suffered a more relevant moral loss as the media reported on the violent events for the American public. On the other hand, the Tet Offensive proved that President Johnson could not understand Hanoi's real intentions. The communists did not want to negotiate or share the power over a united Vietnam. Besides their belief in the superiority of communism, they were also practitioners of Rochau's *Realpolitik*: they had the support of the majority of the Vietnamese people, a clear goal, and a consequent military strategy (Kissinger "Diplomacy" 670).

c. Vietnamization

Richard Nixon entered office with the promise of ending the war. He had the support of the majority of the Americans—as he won the elections twice—and also a strategy to reach this end. However, the task required accurate political maneuvering both domestically and internationally. On the home stage, the peace movement was so desperate to finish the war unilaterally that violent protests were spreading all across the country, though most of the

Americans were not ready to accept the defeat of the United States in a military conflict for the first time in its history. This situation was ambivalent as "the American people seemed to be asking their government to pursue two incompatible objectives simultaneously: they wanted the war to end and America not to capitulate" (Kissinger "Diplomacy" 681). On the international level, the reputation of the United States was at stake. The American trustworthiness was essential in global politics, not only for the Western allies of the country, but also for its enemies. The promise that the United States committed itself on the side of the anti-communist South Vietnam created a calculable atmosphere and this would have been damaged in case of a unilateral withdrawal. President Nixon was aware of the importance of balance in geopolitics, and also realized that a perfect solution is unattainable:

> Confusing real peace with perfect peace is a dangerous but common fallacy. Idealists long for a world without conflict, a world that never was and never will be. …
>
> Because of the realities of human nature, perfect peace is achieved in two places only: in the grave and at the typewriter. … Real peace, on the other hand, will be the down-to-earth product of the real world, manufactured by realistic, calculating leaders whose sense of their nation's self-interest is diamond-hard and unflinching. … (Nixon 4)

Hanoi did not leave any doubts about the continuation of its intentions and methods, though President-elect Nixon offered negotiations through back channel diplomacy even before his inauguration. In February 1969, North Vietnam triggered a new wave of attack against American and South Vietnamese targets. Hanoi would have been satisfied with only the unconditional and full withdrawal of U.S. troops from Southeast Asia and the removal from office of Nguyen Van Thieu who was the President of South Vietnam. Obviously, these were unacceptable demands to

the U.S. government whose notion was dual: leaving South Vietnam with the capability to protect itself against the communists and upholding the international prestige of the United States. This strategy became known as Vietnamization which made the decrease of the number of combating U.S. troops from over half a million to 20000 until 1972 possible (Kissinger "Diplomacy" 680-682).

d. Peace in Paris

The Nixon Administration recognized that Hanoi would only participate in diplomatic negotiations if it was forced by intensified military actions against its supply chains and if it had perceived that reinforcement would not come from the Soviet Union or China. The military targets were almost self-appointed as the communists had a network of trails and basements both in Laos and Cambodia since the nineteen-sixties. Although these two countries were neutral—at least officially—, Laos was already under siege along the Ho Chi Minh Trail. In Cambodia, despite the country's attempt to remain neutral in the conflict, the Vietcong built a system of secret bunkers all along the South Vietnamese border. Therefore, in 1969, President Nixon extended the war to Cambodia and ordered massive air strikes against communist shelters. In 1970, military operations on the ground were also launched to enhance the pressure on Hanoi. At the same time, the withdrawal of U.S. military units was also accelerating under relatively safe circumstances as the Army of the Republic of Vietnam continued the fight against the communists and the guerrillas were cut from their reinforcements. On the diplomatic field, Kissinger launched a new strategy. He met on several occasions with the Soviet ambassador in Washington D.C., Anatoly Dobrynin, and ensured him that the USA was intending to finish the war, however it would not be possible until Hanoi clung stubbornly to its demands for the unilateral withdrawal of U.S. troops. Kissinger argued that the Soviet Union gave most of the military equipment to the North Vietnamese,

therefore Moscow could have facilitated the process in Vietnam if it had put pressure on Hanoi. As both the Soviets and the Americans were interested in a good relationship between each other rather than growing tension over a further escalating conflict in Southeast Asia, ambassador Dobrynin forwarded the American message to the Kremlin and Hanoi, too (Schulzinger 31-34).

The official negotiations started in Paris where four delegations were planned to attend: the USA, North Vietnam, South Vietnam, and the Vietcong. Naturally, Saigon rejected the attendance of the Vietcong. As the official channel was stuck in 1970, the secret talks began between Kissinger and the de facto leader of the North Vietnamese delegation, Le Duc Tho. In spite of the orchestrated diplomatic and military pressures, the first round of the meetings did not bring what Kissinger expected. Hanoi observed not only the situation on the battlefields, where the communists could have been persistent for a long while, but also the domestic challenges in the United States. Le Duc Tho was aware of the anti-war movement, the coming midterm elections, and even the dissension within the Nixon Administration, therefore he rejected the cease-fire as he felt himself in a superior position (Kissinger "The White House Years" 436-448).

There were three rounds of the negotiations in Paris between 1970 and 1973. Le Duc Tho's attitude did not change until the last chapter of the talks; he demanded the ending of the American occupation of Vietnam and the overthrowing of Nguyen Van Thieu's government in Saigon all along. At the end, however, three reasons reshaped Hanoi's approach to the peace talks. First, the massive military losses: the mining of the harbors and the continuous bombing broke the chain of supply. Second, neither the Soviet Union nor the People's Republic of China intervened into the conflict actively. And third, after Nixon's landslide victory in November 1972, Hanoi was afraid that the President would have been even more resolute to increase the military efforts. The Paris Peace Accords were signed on January 23, 1973. It had several provisions, among them the

withdrawal of all U.S. forces from Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia. The peace, however, between the South and the North did not last for long without American participation. In 1975, communist troops occupied South Vietnam, and the two countries were unified under Hanoi's rule in 1976 (Kissinger "Diplomacy" 684-697).

VII. Conclusion

In the late nineteen-sixties, the United States found itself in an impossible positon. For the previous two decades, the political establishment governed the country by the patterns of a derailed foreign policy that was based on containment. Former administrations intended to fulfill the United States' self-imposed moral obligation to stand firmly against the expansion of communism everywhere on the globe, despite the fact that geopolitical realities limited the options to comply with such commitment.

In 1969, Richard Nixon's new government brought a new and profoundly different approach to foreign affairs. The President and his National Security Advisor envisaged a global order in which the peaceful coexistence of the superpowers would grant balance and stability in world affairs. Within four years, the United States finished the Vietnam War, established diplomatic relations with China, and normalized the relationship with the Soviet Union.

As the architect of the Nixon Administration's foreign policy, Henry Kissinger understood that expectations for permanent solutions were illusory, and achievements in international relations would not stand for long as the geopolitical landscape was changing constantly. Therefore, as a responsible politician, he observed the world as it really was and adjusted the country's diplomatic actions to the global political realities. He believed that the United States had to focus on realistically achievable goals instead of an idealized best option.

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