HENRY KISSINGER

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HENRY KISSINGER

An Intimate Portrait of the Master of Realpolitik

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Profile Books

First published in Great Britain in 2025 by
Profile Books Ltd
29 Cloth Fair
London
ECIA 7JQ

www.profilebooks.com

1 3 5 7 9 10 8 6 4 2

Typeset in Berling Nova Text by MacGuru Ltd
Printed and bound in Great Britain by
CPI Group (UK) Ltd, Croydon CR0 4YY

A CIP catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

ISBN 978 1 80522 460 0

For my father

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Foreword

It was one of those winter days where Paris sat bathed in sunlight beneath a sky of cloudless blue, the air cold and crisp. I was sitting in a cosy living room overlooking the Théâtre de l'Odéon. Suddenly the friend I was with asked me: 'Why are you so interested in Kissinger, Jérémie? It's something I've wondered for a while now.'

It was a legitimate question. Over the previous year, he, like all my friends and family – not to mention my students – had counted the cost of the passion that gripped me at every discussion of the career and life of Henry Kissinger. Each time we met, I bombarded him with unsolicited anecdotes regarding the former US secretary of state. But as I opened my mouth to explain precisely why, for the past few months, I had been spending every spare moment reading and writing about Kissinger, I didn't know where to begin.

As a teenager, I was already intrigued by the man whom some people had no hesitation in mentioning in the same breath as those great diplomats, Talleyrand and Metternich. I knew next to nothing of his life, yet I had the faint intuition that Henry Kissinger was one of those rare contemporary figures to have 'written' history with a capital H. Above all, he embodied a word – 'diplomacy' – that fired my imagination. Indeed, his book *Diplomacy* had pride of place in my bedroom.

Leaving aside the intellectual and political legacy of this statesman, there was something fascinating about the man himself. Henry Kissinger was one of those exceptional humans capable of turning their life into a novel. A novel in which a

man's faults, fragilities, failures and triumphs appear endlessly entwined with History itself.

There is something extraordinary about the life journey of this little Jewish boy from Germany who was born just outside Nuremberg, grew up in the very heart of Nazism and went on to become the greatest diplomat the United States has ever known.

Fate may have placed this child in the lion's den, but he would become the man who toppled regimes, forged alliances that would alter the global balance of powers and lastingly reshaped the geopolitical chessboard of the twentieth century.

Thirteen members of his family were murdered in the death camps. He returned to the land of his birth wearing an American army uniform to fight Hitler's regime and denazify the country he'd had to flee in fear.

He first set foot in New York as a penniless fifteen-year-old refugee in late summer 1938. Thirty-five years later, he would take the oath of office as secretary of state in the gilded halls of the White House.

Recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize and the admiration of an entire nation, he would spend his entire life plagued by a deep sense of insecurity, which would often take him to the verge of paranoia.

Henry Kissinger's life also says much about a country, the United States of America, where I studied and then lived. A country that I loved more and more as I explored it, and which remains very dear to me – despite the division, the fear and the fury that gnaw away at it.

The United States became the leading twentieth-century superpower because it was a place where a young German Jewish refugee could, through his work ethic and his character, attain one of the highest offices. If you're seeking the roots of American power, look no further than this country's

extraordinary capability to nourish itself with the greatest talents in the world, while also enabling those individuals to express their full potential. In fact, it is striking that three of the greatest American diplomats of the second half of the twentieth century – Madeleine Albright, Zbigniew Brzeziński and Henry Kissinger – were immigrants. This exceptional trio, who helped shape American power and were tireless defenders of the nation's interests, were all born in the heart of Europe.

For a long time, America had the self-confidence to give immigrants from across the world their chance, enabling the country to become an empire that dominated the world politically, economically, technologically and culturally. But having withdrawn into itself these past few years, having given in to the fear of the other and forgotten what made it great, American power now faces a grim future. The day when it will no longer be possible for a young Henry Kissinger – whether from Guatemala, Syria or Eritrea – to become a future secretary of state is the day that the United States will have fallen into an inexorable decline.

But the primary reason for my fascination with the life of Henry Kissinger is that it carries so many lessons for Europe, the continent where I'm from and the cradle of a political project that I consider to be both the most precious and the most fragile.

The most important teaching of Kissinger's life is that when Europe yields to the sort of vehement nationalism and hatred – chief of which is antisemitism – that still plague it today, it deprives itself of some of its most talented children, denying them the opportunity to accomplish their innate potential and therefore condemning them to exile. There is something tragic in the fact that it was not in the service of Europe that Henry Kissinger deployed his vast talents, despite being born in the heart of the continent.

Kissinger's life is also a ceaseless reminder that if Europe wishes to avoid disappearing into the dustbin of history, then it

must finally equip itself with a diplomacy worthy of the name. This means that at a time when the European Union is gripped between the national egotisms of its member states and third powers that no longer hide their desire to weaken or even kill it, the need for a European *Realpolitik* has never been more pressing. 'A country that demands moral perfection in its foreign policy', wrote Kissinger, 'will achieve neither perfection nor security.'[1] If we continue to restrict ourselves to a simulacrum of foreign policy – one that all too often is muddled with an idealism that is nothing but the mask of our own cowardice – then we will condemn ourselves to collapse.

Where are the Richelieus, Bismarcks, Metternichs and Kissingers of today who could mould Europe into a twenty-first-century power? The European Union is fortunate to have a European diplomatic service. It now needs to be empowered with the people and the strategic vision to enable Europe finally to be an actor in the evolution of the world and no longer merely a spectator.

This may seem an inaccessible dream to many. But as the student Kissinger wrote so superbly about Metternich: 'For men become myths, not by what they know, nor even by what they achieve, but by the tasks they set for themselves.'[2] The time is therefore nigh for Europeans to dream great things for Europe once more.

Still, despite the many reasons that led me, a young and passionate European, to interest myself in Henry Kissinger, I do not ignore the mistakes, the personal faults or the grey areas that marked his life.

I do not ignore that Kissinger oversaw a bombing campaign of Cambodia and Laos, which caused the death of hundreds of thousands of civilians, and during which more bombs were dropped by American planes than by the Allies during the whole of the Second World War. I do not ignore the constant support that the Nixon administration afforded to Pakistan

– accused by many of having perpetrated a massacre in Bangladesh in 1971.[3] I do not ignore the American backing provided to General Pinochet during both the military coup that brought him to power in Chile in 1973 and the repression that followed. And nor do I ignore the approval given by the Ford administration to the brutal invasion of East Timor by Indonesia in 1975. These are indelible stains on the legacy of Henry Kissinger.

But whatever the moral judgement that each of us is free to make about the man, I remain convinced that Kissinger's life, his relationship to history, his vision of foreign policy and his writings have left a trace that will linger long after his death. And in that trace, we Europeans may find many of the answers to some of the major challenges facing us.

Given the plethora of books that have been written about Henry Kissinger, this one has no ambition to be a new biography. I am neither a historian nor an academic; I do not claim to give an exhaustive account of Kissinger's contradictions, his exceptional intelligence, and the twists and turns of his career. In the following pages I seek only to sketch the intellectual portrait of a man who left a deep mark on me. A man who – despite the many shades of grey that colour his life – I am convinced may be a huge source of inspiration for all those wishing to build the European diplomacy of tomorrow.

De Gaulle

Henry Kissinger harboured big ambitions when he arrived in Paris on 28 February 1969. He had just taken up his post as national security advisor and hoped that Nixon's three-day trip to the French capital would mark the start of a new relationship between the two countries. After a decade of strained relations, with Charles de Gaulle taking a defiant stance vis-à-vis the United States, Kissinger felt that the time had come to mend fences with this key, yet difficult, ally.

It would be an understatement to say that the 1960s were a time of recurring tensions between Paris and Washington. First, John F. Kennedy saw de Gaulle shoot down his grand plan for a transatlantic partnership between the United States of America and the 'United States of Europe'.[1] Then France refused to sign the Partial Test Ban Treaty of 1963. And no one in Washington forgot that it was the Gaullists who, in an improbable alliance with the Communists, torpedoed the dream of a European army in 1954. Following the failure of the European Defence Community, Charles de Gaulle then opposed a project (which had the support of the White House) to create a Multilateral Force comprising a naval nuclear deterrent crewed by personnel from multiple NATO members.

It is striking that the United States at the time unreservedly supported the project to build a European army. Washington saw this initiative as complementary to, rather than competing with, NATO. Even more importantly, the American leadership viewed a European army as being a prerequisite to the rebirth of European power, itself a precondition to the strengthening of the transatlantic relationship.[2]

When he came to power in 1963, Lyndon B. Johnson also reproached de Gaulle for failing to continue the legacy of the founding fathers of European integration. He detected in the new Franco-German relationship a cloaked strategy to isolate the United Kingdom. Indeed, the French leader's veto in January 1963 of Britain's request to join the European Economic Community was very poorly received in Washington. De Gaulle was perceived as an obstacle both to European integration and to the strengthening of the transatlantic relationship – two ambitions that American leaders viewed as intrinsically linked.

In this context, the decisions taken by Paris in 1966 to withdraw from both the gold-dollar standard and NATO's integrated command structure were no surprise to Lyndon B. Johnson. But they fuelled his exasperation with the French president, an exasperation that reached its peak when Charles de Gaulle firmly condemned the American intervention in Vietnam in his famous speech in Phnom Penh in September 1966. The fact that he predicted a very heavy defeat for the Americans was less than appreciated in the corridors of the White House.

Amid the chorus of disapproval voiced at Charles de Gaulle in the United States, there was one exception: Henry Kissinger. In an article for *Harper's* published in March 1965, entitled 'The illusionist: why we misread de Gaulle', he tried to explain what guided the French president's foreign policy.[3] According to Kissinger, it was a mistake to see any kind of anti-Americanism in de Gaulle's declarations and positions.

For Kissinger, it was clear that de Gaulle considered the United States to be France's indispensable ally. During periods of extreme tension with Moscow – be it when an American spy plane was shot down over Russia in May 1960, the construction of the Berlin Wall in August 1961 or the Cuban Missile Crisis in summer 1962 – the French president supported the United States without an ounce of hesitation. Kissinger also pointed out

that there were many subjects, notably those related to the Cold War and the stance to be taken vis-à-vis Soviet power, where there were no major strategic divergences between France and the United States.

But de Gaulle was an ally who could not accept his country and Europe becoming an American protectorate. The French president had assigned himself the role, according to Kissinger, of 'teach[ing] his people and perhaps his Continent attitudes of independence and self-reliance'.[4] A transatlantic relationship or a supranational body that would constrain Europe and France too rigidly was not compatible with the feeling of grandeur that he wished to impart to the French people. It was therefore to reinspire his country and give his fellow citizens 'a specifically French sense of purpose'[5] that de Gaulle pursued the vision of an independent foreign policy.

Kissinger had already set out a similar analysis in an article headlined 'Strains on the Alliance', published in *Foreign Affairs* in January 1963. 'We have treated what is essentially a political and psychological problem as if it were primarily technical,' he wrote, before going on to say: 'We have shown little understanding for the concerns of some of our European allies that their survival should depend entirely on decisions made 3,000 miles away.'[6]

For the man who was still a Harvard professor, the major error committed by the Kennedy and Johnson administrations was having judged de Gaulle's policies without seeking to understand the historical context of his actions and the psychology of the French nation. In particular, he reminds the reader that although the United States and France shared the status of victor in 1945, this masked two quite different realities on either side of the Atlantic.

For America, the end of the Second World War marked the high point of its political, economic and military power. Conversely, despite de Gaulle having succeeded in hauling his country far enough to earn a place at the victors' table, France

was not invited to either Yalta or Potsdam. Consumed by the question of decline, the French knew deep down that they were part of a Europe that was no longer the global centre of gravity. Kissinger understood that this was one of the reasons why France clung so fiercely to the remnants of a colonial empire, the last symbol of a bygone and much-missed power. In this context, the Americans were making a mistake by reacting so vehemently to Gaullist initiatives. They must realise that de Gaulle, like his people, could not be content with a bipolar world in which Europe would no longer be a main player in the march of history. This meant allowing France 'to regain – wherever possible – the right of independent decision'.[7]

However, it was not only the work undertaken by Kissinger to understand the motivations of Gaullist foreign policy that made a Franco-American rapprochement in 1969 possible. This development also grew out of the close personal relations forged between Nixon and de Gaulle over several years.

The two leaders met for the first time in April 1960, when Nixon was Eisenhower's vice president. Then, during the American's own spell in the wilderness, the French president received Nixon on two occasions, in 1963 and 1967.

The two men admired each other and shared common views on many subjects. A little over a year before Nixon's election to the White House, de Gaulle painted a flattering portrait of him to the US Military Attaché in Paris, Vernon Walters, confidently predicting that Nixon would become president one day, but noting that 'Mr Nixon, like me, will have been an exile in his own country.'[8] On 28 February 1969, at a dinner at the Elysée Palace in honour of the US president, de Gaulle again expressed his friendly feelings towards his American counterpart, insisting on the strength of the Franco-American relationship. To those who would accuse him of anti-Americanism, de Gaulle declared that although the United States and France are 'two countries naturally different in their situation,

size and interests', they are 'drawn together by a two-centuries-old friendship, as well as by the profound community of a certain human ideal whose flame has often spread more light and warmth in both our countries than anywhere else on our earth'.[9] In response, Nixon paid de Gaulle fulsome homage, calling the French president 'a leader who has become a giant among men because he had courage, because he had vision, and because he had the wisdom that the world now seeks to solve its difficult problems'.[10]

But beyond the declarations and symbolic gestures, the French and American leaders would use this visit, which took place from 28 February to 2 March 1969, to attempt to make joint progress on several major areas. There were three in particular where Kissinger felt that, rather than being an obstacle, Charles de Gaulle could help resolve a number of challenges faced by the United States. These three areas were none other than the three pillars of American foreign policy that Kissinger wished to implement.

To understand these three pillars, we should remember that Kissinger had long studied Bismarck (initially as a student and later as a professor). Notably, he drew the conclusion that the genius of the Iron Chancellor lay in his ability to foster a system of alliances with powers whom his peers considered incompatible with each other. It was by simultaneously concluding an alliance with the Austro-Hungarian Empire and a secret Reinsurance Treaty with Tsarist Russia that Bismarck was able to extricate Prussia from its isolation.

Similarly, Kissinger thought that it would be possible for the United States to pursue three parallel foreign policy axes that hitherto appeared contradictory. He wanted to strengthen the transatlantic relationship, pursue a policy of Détente with the USSR and bring about a rapprochement with the China of Mao Zedong. His analysis of Gaullist foreign policy had convinced him that the French president could be a precious ally for all three.

For Kissinger, the strengthening of the transatlantic relationship should not be based on a deeper European integration. Breaking with the prevailing vision of the Kennedy and Johnson administrations, he thought that nation states would remain the key players in any European project and that Washington should therefore deepen relations with them. It would be through a policy of bilateral rapprochement, notably with France, that a strengthening of the transatlantic relationship would be possible. Kissinger's European vision, shared by Nixon, was music to de Gaulle's ears.

As regards the policy of Détente, Kissinger judged, correctly, that France would not be opposed to this in principle. He understood that de Gaulle, like most European leaders, wished only to avoid a rapprochement between Washington and Moscow becoming synonymous with a consolidation of blocs and a carving-up of the world to Europe's detriment. For Kissinger, the policy of Détente as he imagined it would, in fact, dovetail extremely well with the policy towards Russia and the Eastern Bloc pursued by the French president, who wished to establish a closer dialogue with the Kremlin.

Finally, Kissinger knew that he could count on the backing of Charles de Gaulle in a rapprochement with Beijing. The French president had long felt that the West should reach out to China in order to understand it better and to place it back on its spot on the geopolitical chessboard. The recognition of the People's Republic of China by France in January 1964 was studiously analysed by Kissinger and Nixon. Nixon recounted in his *Memoirs* how de Gaulle had told him: 'I do not feel that we should leave them [China] isolated in their rage. The West should try to get to know China, to have contacts, and to penetrate it. (...) It would be better for you to recognize China before you are obliged to do so by the growth of China.'[11]

During their ten hours of private meetings, Nixon and de Gaulle discussed these three areas at length. But another, unexpected subject also reared its head.

The first day of their visit, Kissinger hung back. He still lacked both the reputation and the aura that would soon come his way. But de Gaulle approached him. 'Why don't you get out of Vietnam?' the French president asked brusquely. Kissinger was momentarily speechless. Then he stammered: 'Because a sudden withdrawal might give us a credibility problem.' 'Where?' asked de Gaulle imperiously. 'In the Middle East,' replied Kissinger timidly, struggling to regain his habitual self-assurance. 'How very odd,' said de Gaulle with a sceptical tone. 'It is precisely in the Middle East that I thought your enemies had the credibility problem.' Then the French leader turned on his heel and began talking to another member of the delegation, the exchange with Kissinger over as fast as it had begun.[12]

The two men understood that the United States should extricate itself from the quagmire of Vietnam. But they disagreed on how to do so. De Gaulle felt that every day the American troops spent in Vietnam further weakened the world's leading superpower. It was not just a question of the thousands of young American lives being lost. The United States was also losing its greatest strength: its moral authority. A month later, at Eisenhower's funeral, de Gaulle and Nixon discussed the matter further. 'De Gaulle again urged that I take steps to put an end to the Vietnam War as quickly as possible,' Nixon later confided.[13]

Kissinger, however, felt that a sudden withdrawal on the part of the United States would send a negative signal to the rest of the world. Washington would lose the respect of all those who counted on the United States to stem the expansion of communism. He believed that American troops should respect a 'decent interval' of two or three years before withdrawing. Future events would prove that the American leaders would have been wise to follow the advice of their French ally.

Despite this disagreement, Nixon's trip to Paris, which ended on 2 March 1969, sealed the tightening of relations between France and the United States. It kicked off a three-year period during which Washington and Paris would coordinate

much more closely. Nevertheless, it would soon be without Charles de Gaulle. On 28 April 1969, barely two months after his American counterpart's visit, the French president resigned. The special relationship between Nixon and de Gaulle would forever remain 'an unfinished symphony', to quote the historian Maurice Ferro.[14]

Although Kissinger spent very little time with de Gaulle while in office, the man who Nixon dubbed 'the giant' left a deep impression on him. In his account of his years at the White House, Kissinger sketches a laudatory portrait of the French president in just a few lines: 'He had performed the dramatic feats required by the crises that had brought him to power. He had consolidated new political institutions. He had achieved the decolonization of French Africa while maintaining French self-confidence at home and its prestige in the former colonies. Barely overcoming incipient civil war, he had restored French pride by giving it a central role in the policies of Europe and the Western Alliance. One of the principal purposes of his challenge to the United States was to inspire French self-assurance.'[15]

The rest of Kissinger's analysis is as interesting for what it conveys of his own vision of power as it is for his thoughts on the French leader. 'But the student upheavals of 1968 had shaken de Gaulle. And the challenges facing him thereafter were not of a magnitude he considered relevant to his vision of himself. To ensure a growing economy, to arbitrate contending claims on limited resources, to organize and manage a bureaucratic state – these were tasks for what he half-contemptuously called "quartermasters", not for heroic figures.'[16]

For Kissinger, de Gaulle was one of those very rare figures who leave their mark on history. But was he the man to submerge himself in the challenges inherent in the day-to-day stewarding of a country, the inner turmoil of political life, and the manoeuvrers of parties? No, the man who had saved France's honour was above all that. In this context: 'The referenda of April 17

[1969] provided the occasion for a dramatic departure instead of the slow erosion of authority that he so feared.'[17]

With this last sentence, Kissinger underlined the stark contrast between de Gaulle and the vast majority of our current leaders – those who, lacking the legitimacy that history had conferred upon de Gaulle, still try, each day, and with much political manoeuvring, to postpone the moment when they will have to leave office. Truly great men, in Kissinger's view, do not cling to power. For power is merely the means to enable the great man to change the course of history. Power without authority is worthless. And when authority starts to slip away, a sense of responsibility ought therefore to oblige a leader to step down.

At a conference held at Columbia University in April 1990 to commemorate the centenary of de Gaulle's birth, Kissinger described him as the 'true great man'. After talking at length about the man who 'had restored to France a certain vision of its identity and its prestige', Kissinger confessed: 'I have a great nostalgia for an American version of de Gaulle.'[18]

But Kissinger rued the fact that among Europe's leaders, too, there were no worthy heirs to the man whose moral and intellectual worth and 'strength of personality' he so admired. During an interview with *Der Spiegel* on 10 October 2005, Kissinger was asked which historical figure – Churchill or Bismarck – had left the deepest impression on him. Kissinger gave an answer that said it all: 'I have a lot of respect for Charles de Gaulle as well.' Then, doubling down on his appraisal of the former French president, he went on: 'In the period after the Second World War, there were still leaders in Europe who represented weak countries, but possessed a sense of global foreign policy.'[19]

For Kissinger, Charles de Gaulle would forever embody the 'man of character', an archetype defined by the French leader himself in *Le fil de l'épée* – a treatise on military leadership, written while he was still a young officer: 'Assured in his

judgements and aware of his strength, he makes no concession to the desire to please. (...) "Arrogant, undisciplined" the mediocre call him (...). But when events take a serious turn, the danger becomes pressing, and collective salvation suddenly requires initiative, a taste for risk and steadfastness, then perspectives change and justice shines forth. A sort of groundswell pushes the man of character to the fore.'[20]

Football

On 18 September 1970, Kissinger charged into the office of Bob Haldeman. 'I have to see the president now,' Nixon's national security advisor told the White House chief of staff. 'Why?' asked the man who would be swept up in the Watergate scandal several years later. An incensed Kissinger slammed a file down on the desk and extracted several aerial reconnaissance photographs taken by a U-2 spy plane over Cuba. 'It's a Cuban seaport, Haldeman, and these pictures show the Cubans are building soccer fields.'

Haldeman was nonplussed. Kissinger gesticulated at the images: 'Those soccer fields could mean war, Bob!' Seeing that he still didn't understand, Kissinger spelled it out: 'Cubans play baseball. Russians play soccer.'[1]

That day, Kissinger's love for the beautiful game would enable him to pull off a resounding diplomatic success.

After his meeting with Haldeman, Kissinger was able to convince Nixon to investigate further. The Americans very soon discovered that the Russians were indeed on the ground in Cuba, in direct violation of the agreement that had put an end to the Missile Crisis of 1962. They were providing the Cubans with technical support to build a naval base at Cayo Alcatraz. It was a *casus belli* for the United States. Following very strong pressure on Moscow from the White House, the Soviet leadership were eventually obliged to abandon their project. A major new Cuban crisis had just been avoided.

We have to travel back four decades before that autumn day in 1970 to understand Henry Kissinger's passion for football. It

started on his maternal grandfather's farm in Leutershausen, where the young Henry spent his summers. 'I started playing when I was about six,' he would explain later. 'I played goalie for a brief period, then I broke my hand. After that, I played inside-right and midfield. I played until I was 15. I really wasn't very good but I took the game very seriously.'[2]

So seriously did Henry take it that he dreamt up new tactics for his teammates. His chief innovation was to encourage them to pull back and defend, gradually wearing down the opposing team who were rendered incapable of scoring. Of course, it would be a step too far to credit Henry Kissinger with the invention of the famous *catenaccio*. For one thing, this tactical system – popularised by Helenio Herrera when he managed the great Inter Milan in the 1960s – was not purely defensive.

The all-consuming passion of their eldest son for football provoked the consternation of Paula and Louis Kissinger. In an article published in the *Los Angeles Times* in 1986, Kissinger wrote: 'My father despaired of a son who preferred to stand for two hours watching a soccer game rather than sit in comfort at the opera or be protected from the elements in a museum.'[3] Above all, his parents fretted about the risks their son now ran to satisfy his passion.

Once the Nazis took power, Jews were forbidden to set foot in a stadium. But young Henry had become a fervent supporter of SpVgg Fürth, the local club that was the pride of the town, having won the German championship in 1914, 1926 and 1929. Despite risking being beaten up if he were recognised, Henry had taken to sneaking into the stadium to watch his favourite team play, much to his parents' chagrin. 'After '33, going to a soccer match was some adventure for me,' he would later admit.[4]

Yet it was another event that would force him to park his love of football. When he emigrated to Washington Heights with his family in 1938, Henry was quite saddened to discover that nobody he met over there was interested in the game. Put out,

the teenager resolved to set his heart on that most American of sports: baseball. The football stars of his childhood gave way to that icon of the New York Yankees, the famous Joe DiMaggio.[5]

This break with football was only temporary, however. A few years later, Kissinger returned to Germany as a solider in the US Army. Once the war was over, he stayed behind in the land of his birth to participate in the denazification campaign. Once again, he could give free rein to his passion, slipping away to watch amateur matches whenever his schedule permitted. He would drive around the countryside at the wheel of his Mercedes – confiscated from a former Nazi – visiting the various football grounds close to his base in the town of Bensheim.

But paradoxically, it was when Kissinger was at the peak of his career that he followed football the closest. As soon as he entered the White House, his staff made it a habit to slip the latest SpVgg Fürth results into his Monday-morning briefing.[6] And it was preferable for their boss's mood – and thus theirs – that these results were good. Above all, Kissinger now received regular invitations from his counterparts to attend matches, notably in Europe and Latin America. As he confided in an interview with Reuters in 2009, this was one of the great pleasures of his life as a diplomat.[7]

On 3 July 1974, on the way back from meeting with the Soviet leadership in Moscow, Kissinger decided to stop in West Germany. The Netherlands, captained by Johan Cruyff, were playing Brazil in one of the most memorable clashes of that World Cup. When Kissinger and his thirty-eight-member security team entered the stadium in Dortmund, the crowd rose as one to give him a standing ovation.[8] Granted, the hero of the evening – during which the O*ranje* schooled the *Seleção* – would forever be the 'Flying Dutchman'. But there is no doubt that Kissinger's ego was lastingly flattered by the acclaim he received that night, particularly since some of his other visits to stadiums would be less well received. In December 1976,

the equally football-mad British foreign secretary, Anthony Crosland, invited his American counterpart to accompany him to Stamford Bridge, the legendary ground of Chelsea F.C. (then in the second division). Shortly before kick-off, Kissinger popped into the dressing room of the home team to say hello. The players, most of whom had no idea who he was, greeted the secretary of state with a mixture of indifference and sarcasm. 'Who's that wanker?' one of them asked.[9]

Such let-downs did not affect Kissinger's love of the game one iota. In fact, he gradually came to realise the extent to which football could be a most useful diplomatic tool.

One morning in May 1973, Kissinger found himself at Zavidovo, the Soviet equivalent of Camp David. He was only the third foreign dignitary to have had the honour of being invited to what was the favourite retreat of the highest political echelons of the USSR. The meeting he was due to have with Leonid Brezhnev, the Soviet leader, was crucial to the success of the summit to be held with Nixon at the White House a few days later. But discussions very quickly became bogged down, whether regarding arms control, nuclear non-proliferation or grain supply, and the exchanges between the two men got progressively frostier. Suddenly, the Soviet leader changed tack: 'I just read a book about Brazilian football.' Aware of Kissinger's love of the game, and himself known to bunk off a Politburo meeting to catch a Dynamo or Lokomotiv Moscow match, Brezhnev embarked on an anecdote about the superlative Brazilian dribbler Garrincha.[10] When negotiations resumed shortly afterwards, they were somewhat more relaxed. A new rapport existed between the two men.

The lesson was not lost on Kissinger. The following year, during a meeting with the steely Polish leader, Edward Gierek, he broke the ice by commenting that Poland would surely have beaten West Germany at the recent World Cup if their free-flowing style had not been hampered by the rain and the

atrocious conditions.[11] And it was through teasing Andrei Gromyko about the conflict between East and West through the prism of football that the secretary of state was able to wring a smile from the notoriously dour Soviet minister of foreign affairs.

But there were other world leaders who knew how to play on Kissinger's football mania. In July 1969, the four-day 'Football War' erupted between Honduras and El Salvador, and the Salvadorean foreign minister sought the intercession of Nixon's influential advisor on behalf of his country at any price. To grab his attention, he reminded him that the conflict, the roots of which were long-running, had been sparked by none other than a football match between both countries. 'Anything that arises from soccer, I'm interested in,' Kissinger freely admitted. And he did indeed devote particular attention to this conflict.[12]

Diplomatic game-playing aside, Kissinger also set himself the goal of making soccer popular in his adopted land. This was more than a personal mission; he realised that the rest of the world would always view with a certain suspicion a power that preferred baseball and American football to the beauty and elegance of soccer.

To make his ambition a reality, Kissinger knew that he had to pull off two feats. The first was to attract some of the best footballers on the planet to play in the American championship, a not insignificant challenge given that soccer in the United States was known neither for its excellence nor for the devotion of its fans. Second, he would have to convince FIFA that it was in the interest of the sport for the United States to host the World Cup one day.

To achieve his first goal, Kissinger travelled to São Paulo in early 1975 and invited Pelé to have coffee with him. The Brazilian football legend was in the twilight of his career. He had just announced his international retirement and, lionised the world over, had received some phenomenal offers from Italian

and Spanish clubs. Yet the triple world champion was intent on seeing out his career at his beloved Santos.

But as Pelé would explain in an interview published on 13 May 2016 in *Esquire*, this was before he encountered the persuasive powers of the secretary of state.[13]

At their first meeting, Kissinger got straight to it. 'Listen. You know I'm from the United States, and I'm in politics there. Soccer is coming along there – they're playing it in the schools. Would you like to help us promote soccer in the United States?'[14] Then he explained to Pelé that he would be the ideal figure to give the sport a decisive boost, adding that there was no better club to do this than the New York Cosmos whose owner, Steven Ross, harboured huge ambitions.

A few months later, President Ford welcomed Pelé to the White House. Aware of how little interest the president had in the sport, Kissinger had prepared a briefing note in which he attempted to explain the subtleties of soccer. 'Soccer is a great game to play as well as to watch,' wrote the secretary of state. 'It's easy to learn and, since the object isn't to hide the ball, as in our football, it's easy to follow for the spectator. It doesn't have all those pauses in the action, either.'[15] It isn't certain that Gerald Ford, who'd been a college football star at the University of Michigan, appreciated the manner in which Kissinger gave his opinion of soccer's superiority so frankly.

But Pelé's visit on 28 June 1975 was a diplomatic success. A few weeks later, he donned the Cosmos strip and was soon joined by Franz Beckenbauer. Over the following years, a host of other big-name internationals would make their way Stateside to see out their career in the lucrative North American league.

Kissinger had achieved his first objective, but he knew that bringing the World Cup to the United States would be considerably harder. The man who had successfully conducted myriad thorny negotiations with the most powerful leaders on the planet had underestimated the Machiavellianism and the

deviousness of the hardmen of FIFA: its president, the Brazilian João Havelange, and his henchman (and future successor), the Swiss Sepp Blatter.

In 1983, Colombia announced that, because of its disastrous economic situation, it would not be able to hold the 1986 World Cup as planned. Kissinger spied a wonderful opportunity to promote the joint candidature of the United States and Canada as hosts. But in May 1983, after barely considering the joint application, FIFA decided to award the competition to Mexico, following a unanimous vote worthy of a congress of the Chinese Communist Party. The fact that the TV rights were granted to Televisa, the Mexican media empire then run by one of Havelange's close friends, Emilio Azcárraga, was clearly no coincidence.

The United States would have to wait until 1994 to host the World Cup. Kissinger's past failures and the deeply opaque workings of association football's world governing body caused him to quip that 'the politics of FIFA make me nostalgic for the Middle East'.[16]

In 2011, with rumours of corruption swirling around him, Sepp Blatter thought he could muddle through by announcing the establishment of a committee of 'wise men' with the remit of reforming the institution. To give this committee credibility, he declared that Kissinger would sit on it. Kissinger, however, was used to Blatter's craftiness, and had the good sense to ask what this committee's terms of reference would be. The FIFA president never furnished a clear answer, and Kissinger eventually turned the post down. This would prove to be a sage decision given Blatter's fall from grace a couple of years later.

The disillusions he experienced with FIFA did nothing to dent Kissinger's love of football. In September 2012, he returned to the town of his birth to watch his favourite team – now called SpVgg Greuther Fürth – after it was promoted to the Bundesliga.

Above all, the great diplomat remained an avid observer of football, with which he liked to draw parallels with the history of international relations. Talking about the style of play of the *Mannschaft* in an interview with *Sports Illustrated*, Kissinger explained: 'Both the national team and the generals who followed the Schlieffen Plan during World War I paid meticulous attention to detail. But there is a limit to human foresight, and both suffered when, under the pressure of events, they were forced to deal with contingencies that overwhelmed their intricate planning.'[17]

But his expertise extended beyond analysis of the German national squad. In an interview given to the *New York Times* in 2010, Kissinger observed that 'Brazil has played the most beautiful football, while Italy has specialized in breaking the hearts of its opponents.'[18] As for the United States, his team had certainly improved over the years, but 'we don't have a national style that I've been able to figure out. We're a work in progress, just as we are in managing international affairs on a global basis.'[19] The native German reserved his final words for France, however, who 'are always the most elegant team in Europe'.[20]

Glamour

When Henry Kissinger arrived in Washington in January 1969, he was the toast of academia. Few political commentators would have wagered that this portly professor with a strong German accent would also become the darling of the capital's high society.

It was true that Henry had been paying closer attention to his appearance following his divorce in 1964. He had acquired a sun lamp to temper his pallid complexion. His suits and shirts were now made to measure. He had even bought himself a Mercedes coupé, which he drove somewhat erratically. Yet the new national security advisor was still far from a fashion icon. Everything about his physique and bearing recalled the academic he had been.

But the American capital was desperate to shrug off the torpor that had weighed on it since the end of the Kennedy years. Washington high society was on the lookout for new figures who could provide a little glamour. Such candidates in the Nixon administration were few and far between. Like the president, most of his advisors and cabinet members disdained the media and the Washington set. Which was fortunate for Kissinger, who had discerned that, in 1970s America, power and celebrity were common bedfellows. A man who acquired celebrity would enjoy an aura that would boost his influence. Kissinger also realised the importance of networking. He excelled in forging close connections with the capital's foremost journalists, notably the Alsop brothers and the political commentator Tom Braden.

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