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## "Foreign Policy and Military Planning"

Henry Alfred Kissinger

John Swarthout

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Henry A. Kissinger  
"Foreign Policy and Military Planning"  
Portland State College  
April 4, 1960

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JOHN SWARTHOUT: [recording begins in mid-sentence] ...the hush having settled over the house, I suspect we might as well get under way before you discover that we were going to try to outwait you a bit.

It is always particularly pleasant to be able to introduce a man both of stature and of fame; of stature, because of the fact that there is bound to be pride in association with such an event, and of fame, because of the fact that you don't have to say so much about him. There are some things that it isn't so necessary to discuss: in the instant case, if I may be forgiven for this frightful venture into... humor, if it may be so-called; I think that it's particularly fortunate that our speaker is a man who is well-known, because I can imagine too well you're expecting me to answer the question: "Who is this? I wonder who's 'Kissinger' now?"

[audience murmurs]

If I can be forgiven that frightful pun which I suspect is not new to Doctor Kissinger, and be forgiven as well the slight mispronunciation of his name that the pun necessitated. But to be serious, the pleasure is particularly great for me because his field impinges on that that was once my own. He is a specialist in the field of foreign policy, and today a particular emphasis upon defense policy and strategy as they relate to foreign policy. It's necessa... it's traditional, if not necessary, always to reveal a bit of a speaker's background, and I shall do that for you...

He received his early education in New York City, took his bachelor's degree *summa cum laude*, and his master's and his doctorate at Harvard University. During the war he served as an officer in the Counterintelligence Corps, which gives me another point of tangency with him, and he remains an officer in the Military Intelligence Reserve. In the years since the war, he has served as a consultant to the Psychological Strategy Board, to the Defense Department, to the Operations Coordinating Board of the Executive Office of the President, and he is currently a consultant to the Weapons System Evaluation Group of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the Operations Research Office. On the academic side, he is the Executive Director of the Harvard International Seminar, and the Associate Director of the famous Harvard Center for International Affairs. He has likewise served as Director of Special Studies for the Rockefeller Brothers Fund. He has written in an astonishingly copious way, during his relevantly young life, and I say that noticing how much more my brow has receded than his, and I know that all of us have read with much interest many of the articles that he has produced in the area of foreign policy critique.

The impact that he has had in the course of the last several years upon American defense planning and foreign policy planning has been almost immense, particularly through his book, *Nuclear Weapons And Foreign Policy*, and through the Rockefeller report on national defense which was prepared under his instruction. He was a speaker—incidentally, he has spoken very widely—but he was a principal speaker at the NATO conference of last summer. His ideas have been discussed at length, to my knowledge, within almost all reaches of the Pentagon and the Executive Office of the President.

He is going to talk with us tonight about the subject of American foreign policy and modern military planning, with some emphasis, I suspect, upon the requirements of modern strategy in an atomic age. It is a very considerable pleasure, to me, to introduce to you Dr. Henry A. Kissinger, who will now leave us, I am sure, far more authoritative upon the subjects of his discourse than we were when we walked into this room. Dr. Kissinger.

[applause]

HENRY A. KISSINGER: Mr. Chairman; ladies and gentlemen. [clears throat] After this introduction, I'm almost tempted to quit while I'm still ahead.

[laughter]

I thought I would talk to you this evening about some of the debate which is now going on about the adequacy of our military program, and also to discuss the impact that our military program has on our foreign policy, on such issues as Berlin and arms control. Now, a few weeks ago, the newspapers were full of a debate about what was called the "missile gap." Some people were saying that we have become extremely vulnerable. Others replied that we have never been stronger. There was an argument whether our survival was in fact threatened, and there was the reply that we could destroy any possible opponent. Some people were saying that the Soviet Union had missiles far in excess of ours. Others were saying that it didn't really make any difference because if you added up everything, the balance looked much more favorable.

Now, it is extremely difficult for the average citizen to make up his mind when he is confronted with so many different claims. And what makes it even more difficult is that almost every statement that is being made is true. The difficulty arises not because the statements are untrue, but because the perspective from which they are made varies. It is true that we have never been stronger than we are today, but it is also true that we have never been more vulnerable than we are today. It is true that we could destroy any possible aggressor, but it is also true that our survival is in jeopardy.

Now how can all these statements be simultaneously true? The first thing that has to be noted, if one considers our present situation, is how different it is from a short ten years ago. Ten years ago no one would have asked the question of whether the United States' survival was in fact being threatened. In the last ten years, the mere fact that this issue is being debated, no matter what answer you get today, indicates a basic deterioration of the American situation, some of it avoidable, some of it unavoidable. Now, let me explain how all these statements can be true. It is true that if you add up all the nuclear weapons that the United States possesses, they represent, as the President said, an "awesome display of power." They could undoubtedly destroy any country in the world, and probably all the countries in the world. It is also true that compared to 1955 or to 1950, in absolute terms, we are much stronger.

But our dilemma arises from the fact that the United States of 1960 does not have as its opponent the United States of 1955, but it has as its opponent the Soviet Union of 1960. And it doesn't make the slightest difference whether we are stronger than we were in 1955 if we are weaker than our opponent. From this point of view, the argument that we have never been stronger is not untrue, but simply irrelevant. The second point is one which it is very hard for Americans to get used to, and it is this: up to 1958, every increase in our strength was also an increase of our security, because as long as we had the preponderance of nuclear power, any increase in destructiveness also added to our ability to conduct a war. But in the last few years,

a basic revolution has occurred; the Soviet stockpile of nuclear weapons has increased tremendously, and the Soviet Union has developed missiles which can reach any part of the world, and any part of the United States, in less than half an hour. As a result, we have become almost completely vulnerable.

Now part of this, as I said, was unavoidable. We couldn't have prevented the Soviet Union from developing these missiles. What we could prevent and can still prevent is the consequences that may flow from them. Now the consequences are worrisome, because with missiles and with nuclear weapons, there is a tremendous advantage which goes to the side which strikes the first blow. No matter how good you are when you are on the defensive, the only thing that matters is the part of your power that can survive a surprise attack. A military establishment can deter only if what is left after a surprise attack is still strong enough to pose an unacceptable threat to the aggressor. Now this is what worries people today; the aggressor has a basic advantage in the mere fact that he can pick the time of his attack, and that he can pick a moment of maximum embarrassment to the defender. The power of weapons is so great that the side which attacks may get—simply from the fact of surprise—a very great advantage. This is another reason why it is senseless to say that we have never been stronger, and why it is senseless to add up the number of atomic bombs we have in our stockpile. The only thing that is important is that part of the stockpile which will still be there after the Soviet Union has attacked.

Now, looked at from the point of view of the Soviet Union, or from what an aggressor has to do, an attack on the United States is less complicated than was the attack on Pearl Harbor. This is also hard for Americans to understand. What the Soviet Union has to do is to knock out the bases of our strategic air command; it has to destroy most of the missiles which we possess. It has been testified before a congressional committee that we have about between fifty and a hundred bases of the strategic air command; it is a known fact that we have about forty ATLAS missiles, or we will have by the end of this year. In other words, there are ninety targets which the Soviet Union needs to destroy. General Power has estimated that if they had three hundred long range missiles, they may be able to destroy us. The administration replies that they do not have three hundred long range missiles. I would assume that the administration knows what it is talking about. I would suggest to you, however, that the extent of our peril is shown by the fact that our survival may hinge on fifty Soviet missiles more or less, and this is a terribly uncomfortable position to be in... and a very dangerous position to be in, and one which must be remedied.

[pauses; clears throat]

This is—what I have just described—what is meant by the “missile gap.” The Soviet Union, without any question—no one disputes this—has more missiles than we have. The only question is whether they have sufficiently more to dare an attack on us. And this... by the time we know this, it will be too late to do something about it. This is not something that ought to be discussed in the abstract. It is also not a matter on which one can take a calculated risk, because when the risk has been run, the danger is already overwhelming.

Now, so much will decide of the survival of the United States. All that one could say here is that one hopes that the administration is correct, and that one also hopes that efforts will be speeded up to overcome that particular “gap.” But even if the survival of the United States is not immediately challenged, even if we are not so vulnerable that we could be destroyed directly, we are still in very grave danger. And let me explain where this danger derives from. For over thirteen years, after the end of World War II, we had a nuclear preponderance. First, we had an atomic monopoly. Then we had a tremendous superiority in our strategic air command, and for a long while we would have won any war, no matter how it started, whether we were attacked or whether we attacked. But again, the development of Soviet long-range missiles has changed the situation. Up to 1958, we could tell to the Soviet Union, that any attack on our allies would be answered by what was called “massive retaliation”; that is, a devastating attack on the Soviet homeland. Today, this threat has lost almost all of its credibility. To threaten all-out war, one has to meet the following requirements: one has to convince the opponent that one is actually threatening him, one has to threaten him with something which he believes, and one has to make sure that he calculates the pros and cons in the direction that one wishes him to calculate them.

This becomes increasingly difficult as the missile age develops. In the situation which I described before, no opponent will believe that we will ever attack him. The Soviet Union knows that we have fewer missiles than they have. They know that we can have no rational purpose in attacking them if they should, for example, take Berlin. We can have no rational purpose in attacking them because for every Russian city we destroy, they will be able to destroy an American city. We cannot destroy all their missiles because we have fewer missiles than they do, and it is obvious that if you have fewer missiles, even if each of yours destroys one of theirs—which is technically impossible incidentally, but even if it were technically possible—they would still have plenty left to destroy us. And we cannot use airplanes against missiles effectively, because it takes about three to four hours for an airplane to reach a Soviet missile site from the radar warning net, which is sufficiently long for every missile site to launch several missiles. In other words, the Soviet leaders know, that when we threaten all-out war, we are threatening something that is not rational for us unless they directly attack the United States. If it doesn't make... if they are deterred from attacking the United States by the fear that

in return we will destroy them, it is equally true that we are deterred from attacking them if we are afraid that in return they will destroy us.

And I'm not saying that we will not defend Berlin or any of our other allies, this is not the point. The world in which we live... in the world in which we live, peace can be maintained only by a strategy of deterrence. And for the Soviet... and to achieve deterrence, it doesn't really matter what you intend to do, what matters is what the Soviet Union thinks you intend to do. If we are determined and the Soviet Union thinks we are bluffing, deterrence fails; then a war will start. It is much better to be bluffing, and to have the Soviet Union think you are determined. This is a psychological problem.

Now, let me go back to the other... to the point I made before; if we atta... if the Soviet Union engages in aggression against our allies, or even in blackmail against our allies, we then have to convince them that we are really going to defend our allies. How are we going to do this? How can we convince them that we are prepared to blow up the world in defense of a foreign country? As a practical matter, the only way we could convince them of this is to prove to them that we have a high capacity for being irrational, by behaving in such a manner that they become afraid that this particular issue is so sensitive that it doesn't pay for them to continue to bring pressure on it. I would suggest to you, that this is impossible for any American president. As soon as they try to start, an American president, inevitably, will have to say, "I'm going to be calm, I'm going to be rational, I'm going to negotiate, I'm not going to fly off the handle"—in other words, "I'm going to behave in precisely the fashion which will convince the Soviet Union that I do not mean what I say when I threaten all-out war."

Look at, for example, what the president has said about Berlin. He has said, "A: We will defend Berlin." He has said, "B: There's no point in sending more troops to Europe." And he has said, "C: We cannot fight a nuclear war." Now, if you were Mr. Krushchev and you read those three statements, what conclusion would you draw? I think you would draw the conclusion that we are not very clear in our own minds, and that we are not prepared to face the consequences of the only military policy that we have. I do not draw from this the conclusion that we should be irrational. And I'm not arguing that we should be willing to engage in nuclear war. I'm saying something quite different; I'm saying that since it is clear that we are not willing to engage in all-out nuclear war, since any threat of all-out nuclear war is basically a bluff, we should draw the consequences of getting ourselves other kinds of military strength which are more reassuring to our allies.

Take the problem of a threatened country anywhere around the Soviet periphery. It is told that its safety depends on nuclear weapons, but it doesn't possess any nuclear weapons. It is told

that defense depends on the American willingness to fight an all-out war. But it knows that the United States has become completely vulnerable. It is told that the strategy of deterrence will protect it, but it sees the Soviet armies on its borders and it knows that no matter what we do, it can be and it will be overrun; it may be liberated, but it cannot be protected. And in the nuclear age, liberation is not what these countries want, they want to make sure that they are never overrun.

And all of this has produced a severe crisis in our system of alliances, of which NATO is a glaring example. NATO was created in 1949 in order to resist the danger of Soviet aggression. At the beginning, particularly after the invasion of Korea, it was believed that a Soviet attack on Europe was imminent. And, glorious or at least very high expectations were attached to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, and certain force levels were decided upon. These force levels have never been met, and one of the curious things about NATO is that in ten years of a technological revolution, there has never been an adaptation of the NATO strategic doctrine. The North Atlantic Treaty Organization still avows the same principles that it did a few years... that it did a decade ago... the same strategic principles. And this is almost a certain indication of serious difficulty. Specifically, the mistake has not been entirely our own; both we and our European allies have had an enormous temptation to reduce the burden of military expenditure, and both we and our European allies adopted then a military policy which we called "More bang for the buck," which was another way of saying that we relied more and more on the strategic air command to resist all kinds of aggression.

Now again, this was a possible strategy as long as the United States was invulnerable. But today, when we know that the United States can be destroyed, it simply cannot work any longer. On the other hand, there has been a curious dialogue between us and the Europeans. In our heart of hearts, we know that there are a lot of issues on which we are not prepared to see America devastated. On the other hand, we have been reluctant to tell this to our allies because we have been afraid that they will panic if we told them that. Perhaps we have been afraid to tell it to ourselves, because we didn't want to draw the consequences. On the other hand, our European allies, looking at the world, were afraid to tell us what their misgivings were because they were worried that if they showed any doubt in our lack of resolution—or any doubt in our resolution—they might give us ideas, and that they might bring on what they feared most: namely, an American withdrawal from Europe. The result has been that at almost every NATO meeting the foreign ministers have been telling... making statements to each other which in their heart of hearts they have known to be untrue. And they have taken refuge in declarations of formal unity, and it has always affirmed how solidly they stood together.



But in practice, if we look at the situation there's very little to be cheerful about; fifteen months ago, the Soviet Union made a deliberate, unprovoked and unilateral threat against a Western outpost: the city of Berlin. Now, I don't doubt for a moment that to the Soviet Union, Berlin is an irritating place. But what makes it irritating for them is the fact that they are suppressing freedom in Eastern Europe, that they have installed a puppet regime in Eastern Germany, and that they do not like to see an outpost of free principles within that territory. But the abnormality of that situation comes not from the freedom of Berlin, but the oppression of the Soviet Union, and we mustn't forget this. Secondly, if we suffer a defeat over Berlin, it is almost certain that Western Germany will become radicalized, that it will become extremely nationalistic, that it will feel that it has been... that it has tried to rely on the West, and it has been let down.

What the Soviet Union is deliberately trying to do—all you have to do is to read Krushchev's speeches as he travels through Europe—is to break up the achievements of European unity. To turn Germany against France and France against Germany and Britain against the continent, and to surround itself with a group of squabbling little states. And again, let us not delude ourselves; they have had very great successes in the last fifteen months. In the political field, each ally is negotiating with the Soviet Union separately; Mr. Krushchev has been in America, he's been in France; Mr. McMillan has been in Russia, the president is now going to Russia again, all of this creates... and of course it is always said that they are not negotiating, they are simply engaging in conversations. But, if we separate what is being said for press consumption with what must be true, heads of state cannot just converse, they do not just meet for weekends in the country. The mere fact that they talk to each other in this manner, creates the image of a separate... of the possibility of a separate settlement of each of these countries.

Now, in part, this condition has been produced by our military policy, or by the military policy of the West. When the West came right up against the question of whether it was prepared to defend Berlin, it was realized in Great Britain that the kind of strategy we had developed, namely the reliance on all-out thermonuclear war, might destroy Great Britain completely, so that there would be no life left on the British Isles. And who can blame a British Prime Minister from recoiling before such a prospect. In the past, a nation threatened with attack would generally resist because the worst that could happen to it, as the result of an unsuccessful war, was national disaster. But today, the outbreak of a war may be considered national disaster.

Much of what one reads in the British press today is the result of a horror of being drawn into another war, in defense of the former enemy in this case, and many of the attacks on Germany seem to me due to the fact that if one isn't prepared to fight, it is better to ascribe the worst qualities to the country that one isn't trying... that one doesn't wish to defend. Now, I have

great sympathy for the British position, and our behaviour has been fairly similar. The alternatives that are posed by our military establishment are such that in any crisis, there is always going to be tremendous pressure for not running any risks, and conversely, the Soviet Union will be able to threaten all the countries around its periphery with what I'm willing to predict more and more daring as the years go on.

Take another area: take the problem of arms control negotiations about which we are reading in the press these days. Again, we have been engaged in a curious situation, in a curious pattern of negotiations. On the one hand, our military establishment is increasingly relying on nuclear weapons. On the other hand, we have engaged in arms control negotiations in which we have stigmatized the weapon around which our whole military establishment is built. Every year our military budget announces that our nuclear retaliatory power is the backbone of the freedom of the free world, but our arms control negotiations announce nuclear disarmament as the most desirable goal of American policy. Again, I'm not saying that nuclear disarmament is wrong, I'm saying if that is what one announces as a goal, one has to protect oneself with other means, and build up conventional forces. What one cannot do is to build up nuclear forces and announce nuclear disarmament as a goal. Those two things cannot be combined.

I have seen many committees work on the issue of arms control. A week before the last arms control negotiations started, there did not yet exist an American position. And three days before the conference started, there did not yet exist a Western position. Can anyone believe that a position arrived at in such a manner with so much soul-searching, and with so much confusion, can be maintained in a negotiation with an opponent as skillful as the Soviet Union? And why was it that we didn't have a position? The reason is fairly simple; for one thing, we have no agreement within our government as to what constitute the elements of "security." Every year the Army, the Navy, and the Air Force engage in a donnybrook, in which they try to prove that each of them can win a war all by itself, and in which each of them develops its own strategy for doing everything. You could not in Washington get an agreed position, except in generalities so vague as to be meaningless, as to what, finally, the elements of our security are. If you have no agreement as to what your security is composed of, you cannot make a responsible proposal in the field of arms control, and you are in even a worse position if the opponent overwhelms you with proposals as the Soviet Union has done. You can never be sure in such a situation whether what you are giving up is essential or unessential, whether it increases your security or decreases it. And all these problems are interrelated, to the extent that you control one category, you make it more likely that there is a conflict in another category. Now unless you have understood that, you can go from one difficult situation, and almost hopeless—not hopeless, but very difficult situation—to another.

The result of all of this is that as the years go on, I feel very much that we are moving into a period of increasing danger. Even though things look calm now, it seems to me to be more like the calm in the eye of a hurricane, and that we will soon, within the next four or five years, have to pay the price for not doing our duty if indeed we don't do our duty. Now what is it we have to do? The first thing we have to do is to close the missile gap. We shouldn't have to depend on fifty Russian missiles more or less; that margin of survival is much too narrow. We must bring about a situation in which we simply—it is clear beyond any doubt—that we cannot be destroyed, because if the Soviet Union can create any doubt in the minds of our allies, they will have no option but to surrender.

Secondly, after we have done that, we will have to build up forces for local defense. It has always been said that the West cannot withstand the hordes of Soviet manpower, and that we have to find some technological gimmick to overcome the Soviet reserves of manpower, or the Chinese reserves of manpower. Now the curious fact is that the free world possesses more reserves of manpower than the Communist world. Europe and the United States together have fifty percent more manpower than the Soviet Union, and over three times the industry. And if they say that they cannot defend themselves against Soviet pressure, what they are really saying is that they are not willing to make the effort to defend themselves against Soviet pressure, that they want to take a free ride and hope that perhaps they are not really in danger. As for the Chinese manpower, what matters is not the total manpower but the amount that can be mobilized.

Now, when we have done this—and concurrently with doing this, it is essential also in the political field, that we do two other things—first of all, the disintegration of the Atlantic alliance which has been taking place must be arrested and reversed. If the Soviet Union can separate us from Europe, we will be pushed back into the Western hemisphere, and we will find all over the world the kind of situation that Britain found in the Middle East, and that we may have the beginning of in the Castro regime in Cuba. I have always believed that there must be a much closer integration of both military policies and political measures. I think that it is ridiculous that at the conferences with the Russians, four separate Western delegations are negotiating with the Russians, and the Russians have a shopping list and go from one Western delegation to the other in order to see where they can get the best offer. There should be a single Western delegation with a single chairman, and one single position. There should be, in my judgement, an Atlantic community, and not a—for purposes of negotiations—and not a group of separate states.

And finally, we also have to realize that with the technological revolution that is going on now, it is very difficult to achieve security only through military strength. Every new invention opens

up itself to the possibility of several other inventions, and it becomes harder and harder to protect oneself against all the possibilities. For this reason responsible negotiation in the field of arms control is essential. But when I say responsible, I mean negotiations other than what has been taking place. When Mr. Krushchev announces that he is in favor of total disarmament, he is merely engaging in propaganda, because the simplest technical study will show that it is absolutely technically impossible to inspect a total disarmament plan. Almost all simple things you read in the newspapers on arms control, I can assure you, are almost all wrong. Any real plan would have to be extremely complex, and would have to begin with setting itself some more modest goals, and should not be conducted by slogans and as a psychological warfare campaign.

And in order to make responsible proposals, we have to get clear in our own mind, and that's where the thing is circular; what we can give up and what we must maintain, what our security is composed of and what is inessential. Now this is very hard for us to do; to work simultaneously on political strengthening of the alliance, on arms control, and armaments. It is very hard for us to be—to realize that we have to be—passionate about security and passionate about controlling the power that we had created at the same time. There's so much specialization in America that we always have a tendency to believe that a problem is either political, or military, or economic, or moral. But the difficulty of our position is that unless we can do well in all these categories, we won't be able to do well in any of these categories. And unless we understand that we are in graver danger than one could ever have imagined a decade ago, and completely inconceivable twenty-five years ago, we will never be able to turn to the constructive tasks on which we'll ultimately be judged.

Now, I have spoken to you about a fairly somber subject, because I must say that I am very worried about the manner in which the debate goes on in America, and by the seeming conviction of so many people that one cannot talk seriously to the American people and tell it the truth. If this is really the case, if we have to be fed bromides, if the competition between our political parties winds up in a competition of bland slogans, then all the technical problems that I am discussing are beside the point. Then, in fact, the question of our technical ability to survive will be irrelevant, because we probably will have proved that we don't deserve to survive.

[applause]

DEAN ANDERSON: Dr. Kissinger, I want to thank you for an extremely thoughtful and provocative talk. You have given us a serious theme and if you have treated it in somber tones, perhaps it deserves no brighter hues. In any event, you have raised for us food for our

consideration that I suspect will occupy our minds for many days ahead. I trust it will not be entirely absent from our minds even when the memory of your sentences has dwindled somewhat. We are most thankful to you, and we trust that you will return to us again, and it would be nice if you could do so in a period when you found the American situation more reassuring.

May I remind all of you that you are invited, as cordially as I can extend the invitation, to a reception for Dr. Kissinger in the College Center building, which is just up the street one block; the one next to where the big hole now is in the ground, since we are enlarging it. There will be coffee and refreshments, and I assure you good company and perhaps good talk. This has been the sixth in the series of Portland State College lectures for the year 1959-60. The seventh will be held on the night of Monday, May the second, and the speaker will be C. Northcote Parkinson, whose treatment of a somewhat—well, an almost equally serious theme but in somewhat less somber tones—you may have encountered under the title of *Parkinson's Law*. We are delighted if you are all with us, I hope to see you now up the street just shortly and then again in May. And good night.

[program ends]