
I. Sudan: A Bull's-Eye in Kissinger's Arc of Crisis

Kissinger at Chatham House: making policy behind the back of U.S. Presidents

The following are excerpts from "Reflection on a Partnership: British and American Attitudes to Postwar Foreign Policy," an address by Henry A. Kissinger in commemoration of the bicentenary of the Office of Foreign Secretary, May 10, 1982, Royal Institute of International Affairs (Chatham House), London.

All accounts of the Anglo-American alliance during the Second World War and in the early postwar period draw attention to the significant differences in philosophy between Franklin Roosevelt and Winston Churchill reflecting our national histories. . . . Many American leaders condemned Churchill as needlessly obsessed with power politics, too rigidly anti-Soviet, too colonialist in his attitude to what is now called the Third World, and too little interested in building the fundamental new international world order toward which American idealism has always tended. The British undoubtedly saw the Americans as naive, moralistic, and evading responsibility for helping secure the global equilibrium. The dispute was resolved according to American preferences—in my view, to the detriment of postwar security.

Fortunately, Britain had a decisive influence over America's awakening to maturity in the years following. In the 1940s and '50s our two countries responded together to the geopolitical challenge of the Soviet Union and took the lead in creating the structures of western cooperation . . .

The disputes between Britain and America during the Second World War and after were, of course, not an accident. British policy drew upon two centuries of experience with the European balance of power, America on two centuries of rejecting it. . . . Where Americans have tended to believe that wars were caused by the moral failures of leaders, the British view is that aggression has thrived on opportunity as much as on moral propensity, and must be restrained by some kind of balance of power.

Britain has rarely proclaimed moral absolutes or rested her faith in the ultimate efficacy of technology. . . . Philosophically, she remains Hobbesian: She expects the worst and is rarely disappointed. In moral matters Britain has traditionally practiced a convenient form of ethical egotism, believing that what was good for Britain was best for the rest. . . .

In American discussion of foreign policy . . . the phrase "balance of power," was hardly ever written or spoken with-

out a pejorative adjective in front of it—the "outmoded" balance of power, the "discredited" balance of power. . . . Roosevelt, on his return from the Crimean Conference in 1945, told the Congress of his hope that the postwar era would "spell the end of the system of unilateral action, the exclusive alliances, the spheres of influence, the balances of power, and all the other expedients that have been tried for centuries—and have always failed." . . .

Americans from Franklin Roosevelt onward believe that the United States, with its "revolutionary" heritage, was the natural ally of peoples struggling against colonialism; we could win the allegiance of these new nations by opposing and occasionally undermining our European allies. . . . Churchill, of course, resisted these American pressures, as did the French and some other European powers for a longer period than did Britain. . . .

American attitudes until quite literally the recent decade have embodied a faith that historical experience can be transcended, that problems can be solved permanently, that harmony can be the natural state of mankind. . . . Disillusionment was inevitable.

The ease and informality of the Anglo-American partnership has been a source of wonder—and no little resentment—to Third World countries. Our postwar history is littered with Anglo-American "arrangements" and "understandings," sometimes on crucial issues, never put into formal documents. . . .

The British were so matter-of-factly helpful that they became a participant in internal American deliberations, to a degree probably never before practiced between sovereign nations. In my period in office, the British played a seminal part in certain American bilateral negotiations with the Soviet Union—indeed, they helped draft the key document. *In my White House incarnation then [as national security adviser], I kept the British Foreign Office better informed and more closely engaged than I did the American State Department [emphasis added]. . . .*

In my negotiations over Rhodesia I worked from a British draft with British spelling even when I did not grasp the distinction between a working paper and a Cabinet-approved document. The practice of collaboration thrives to our day, with occasional ups and downs, but even in the recent Falklands crisis, [there is] an inevitable return to the main theme of the relationship.