



Public-interest journalism

Nobody should weep for an unrepentant warmonger

Henry Kissinger is dead, at last

Column by

[Jahanzeb Hussain](#), [Derrick O'Keefe](#) NOVEMBER 30, 2023

Henry Kissinger died Wednesday at the age of 100.

In the United States of Amnesia, as Gore Vidal memorably called the declining empire to our south, no one should be surprised by the outpouring of treachery, platitudinous tributes pouring forth from all corners of the establishment and its servile class of pundits and politicians.

In Canada, former prime minister Stephen Harper — famously emotionless in public — sounded downright sentimental.

“Henry Kissinger combined the theory and practice of international affairs on an unparalleled level that we may never see again. An influential advisor to many, including myself, Dr. Kissinger’s legacy of diplomacy and thoughtful contribution to geopolitics will be sorely missed. My prayers are with his family and loved ones on this difficult day.”

In the rest of the world, it’s a day of relief or quiet celebration that a walking reminder of imperialism’s impunity has finally shuffled off this mortal coil.

Harper wasn’t wrong that Kissinger combined theory and practice. The centenarian was responsible for authorizing, advising on, and explaining away some of the worst crimes of the 20th century.

Officially praised as a “realist,” he was in fact a zealous defender of an unequal world order who unleashed or condoned state violence that killed millions, crushed democratic processes, set back national development or independence struggles, and caused unimaginable human suffering across several continents.

A legacy of corpses

Especially because he obsessively documented his own years as National Security Advisor and Secretary of State, an honest overview of Kissinger's long career provides a realistic picture of the rise and decline of U.S. power over the past century.

Born Heinz Alfred Kissinger to a Jewish family in Bavaria in 1923, he escaped Nazi Germany as a teenager and emigrated to the United States. As a young man, Kissinger excelled at Harvard and quickly rose through the ranks of academia and the foreign policy think tanks.

Richard Nixon's election in 1968 gave Kissinger the opportunity to exercise power directly, and he left a legacy of corpses across the globe during his decade in the Nixon and Ford administrations. To name just a few of countless examples, there was the relentless slaughter of the Vietnamese people, the secret and illegal bombing of Cambodia which he personally directed, the invasion of East Timor, and the overthrow of Chilean democracy which ushered in decades of brutal dictatorship throughout the southern cone of Latin America.

Killing Chile's democracy

Kissinger wasn't just instrumental in backing the 1973 coup in Chile against Salvador Allende's democratically-elected government that resulted in the murder, torture, and disappearance of thousands and the exile of hundreds of thousands. Recently declassified documents reveal that Kissinger worked to prevent Allende's government from assuming power at all after they were elected in 1970. The National Security Archive, a public-interest media project, [explains](#):

"In the weeks before Allende was inaugurated, CIA documents reveal, Kissinger supervised covert operations — codenamed FUBELT — to foment a military coup that led directly to the assassination of Chile's commander-in-chief of the Army, General René Schneider. After initial coup plotting failed, Kissinger personally convinced Nixon to reject the State Department's position that Washington could establish a modus vivendi with Allende, and to authorize clandestine intervention to 'intensify Allende's problems so that at a minimum he may fail or be forced to limit his aims, and at a maximum might create conditions in which collapse or overthrow might be feasible,' as

Kissinger's talking points called for him to tell the National Security Council, three days after Allende's inauguration."

Inside the halls of power, Kissinger was explicit about the purpose of the vicious, anti-democratic violence of U.S. imperialism.

Inside the halls of power, Kissinger was explicit about the purpose of the vicious, anti-democratic violence of U.S. imperialism. Contrary to the standard cover story, that cases like Chile and Vietnam were unfortunate excesses in an effort to stem totalitarian Soviet influence by an otherwise benevolent United States, Kissinger was clear that the point of the violence was to make sure efforts at socialist democracy — as well as more modest efforts at exercising national sovereignty in ways that clashed with U.S. interests — were made to fail.

Crushing Bangladesh

While Kissinger's role in Latin American coups and the wars in East Asia is well documented, his support of what was then West Pakistan against East Pakistan, now Bangladesh, is overlooked. In 1971, the West Pakistani military, officially a Cold War US ally, invaded its eastern province to brutally quell Bengali national aspirations. The military operation, codenamed Operation Searchlight, lasted eight months and resulted in one of the worst genocides in the post-Second World War period. Hundreds of thousands were killed, more than 10 million were made refugees, and Bengali women were systematically raped, often in rape camps, by West Pakistani soldiers. As is the hallmark of every colonial repression, the West Pakistani army deliberately targeted Bengali intellectuals and students, hunting and summarily executing them at Dhaka University.

The US diplomatic establishment was well aware of the atrocities being committed by their ally. A few months into the war, the American consul general in Dhaka Archer Blood, [sent](#) the following note to his government: "Our government has failed to denounce the suppression of democracy. Our government has failed to denounce atrocities... Our government has evidenced what many will consider moral bankruptcy." He was recalled from his mission and Kissinger [trashed](#) his career. Kissinger stood by the Pakistani establishment, viewing it a long-term military partner and a key player in the thawing of relations between Washington and Beijing. Indeed, Nixon's visit to China, and Kissinger's [secret trip to the country](#) in its lead-up, were facilitated by the Pakistani dictator General Yahya Khan.

Humanitarian concerns were definitely not Kissinger's concerns anywhere in the world. If anything, for Kissinger, a people's persecution is their own problem. After all, he said "if it were not for the accident of my birth, I would be antisemitic" since "any people who has been persecuted for two thousand years must be doing something wrong."

Such was his pursuit of hegemony that Kissinger was devoid of any sympathy towards others, including his fellow Jews. He is famous for making light of Israeli prime minister Golda Meir's concern for Soviet Jewry, arguing that if the Russians "put Jews into gas chambers... It is not an American concern. Maybe a humanitarian concern."

Humanitarian concerns were definitely not Kissinger's concerns anywhere in the world. If anything, for Kissinger, a people's persecution is their own problem. After all, he said "if it were not for the accident of my birth, I would be antisemitic" since "any people who has been persecuted for two thousand years must be doing something wrong."

A trail of destruction

As the Rolling Stones obituary notes, "Kissinger's actions from 1969 through 1976, a period of eight brief years when Kissinger made Richard Nixon's and then Gerald Ford's foreign policy as national security adviser and secretary of state, meant the end of between three and four million people."

An unrepentant Kissinger continued to back the projection of American power well into the autumn of his life. He was no longer the principal architect of policies that led to the death of millions across the world, but remained an enthusiastic supporter of it. His support of the 2003 invasion of Iraq was a feather in his cap in that regard.

Kissinger left a long trail of destruction in his wake. Some more famous than others witnessed the long-lasting effects of his policies.

One of them was the beloved late chef Anthony Bourdain. After visiting Cambodia, Bourdain wondered why Kissinger wasn't at The Hague sitting in the dock next to the genocidal Serbian Slobodan Milošević. Kissinger was never brought to account for his crimes for, as Spencer Akerman writes in his Rolling Stone piece, a simple reason: America champions its state murderers. Being the architect of the international order run by his country, Kissinger was never going to be brought to justice by the institutions of the same order.

The Hague is better served to mete out justice to comparatively smaller criminals like Milošević and some run-of-the-mill African warlords. The only court big enough to judge Henry Kissinger is the court of opinion in countries whose public was killed, tortured, burnt and bombarded under his reign. And in their view, Kissinger surely is guilty of some of the worst crimes committed in the 20th century.