A Roundtable on Robert K. Brigham, *Reckless: Henry Kissinger and the Tragedy of Vietnam*

Amanda Demmer, Richard A. Moss, Scott Laderman, Luke A. Nichter, David F. Schmitz, Robert K. Brigham

Introduction to the Roundtable on Robert K. Brigham, *Reckless*

Amanda Demmer

Few historical figures from the second half of the twentieth century provoke disagreement like Henry Kissinger. More than the usual dose of healthy scholarly debate, Kissinger inspires assessments so diametrically opposed that readers can be forgiven for wondering if authors are writing about the same person. It is unsurprising, then, that Robert K. Brigham's new book, *Reckless: Henry Kissinger and the Tragedy of Vietnam*, has already ignited a fresh round of debate about Kissinger and his legacy.

There are three things upon which each of this roundtable's participants agree. The first is that Brigham's book is incredibly well-written and will appeal to specialists, undergraduates, and popular audiences alike. The second is that Brigham's book pursues an ambitious and worthwhile goal. In *Reckless,* Brigham sets out to be the first scholar to hold Kissinger's "record to a scrupulous account based on his own definitions of success and the evidence provided by recently released material."[1] In what we might call a temporally and thematically focused biography, *Reckless* provides an overview of Kissinger's Vietnam-related thinking and diplomacy from 1965 to 1973 in six chronological chapters. Brigham's final assessment is clearly indicted in his title. He argues that "it is clear that the national security adviser's war for peace was more than oxymoronic: it was a total failure."[2] Beyond failing to achieve his aims, Brigham concludes that Kissinger tragically "made a bad situation worse…with his reckless assumptions about the use of force and diplomacy."[3]

In David F. Schmitz's assessment, *Reckless* "brilliantly succeeds" in its objectives. Schmitz characterizes *Reckless* as a "seminal study" of Kissinger's Vietnam War diplomacy that crucially "challenges and corrects many of Kissinger's and his defenders' distortions, setting the record straight on a number of important points." Scott Laderman offers a similar assessment and notes that Brigham "fills a surprising gap in the literature." Although Kissinger "features prominently in a number of important works," Laderman explains, "very little of the literature has placed Kissinger at its center." Like Schmitz, Laderman also praises *Reckless* for calling "into question the myth of Kissinger—which Kissinger himself studiously helped to foster—as the man who successfully achieved 'peace with honor' in Vietnam." Richard A. Moss and Luke A. Nichter offer disparate evaluations. Moss suggests *Reckless* suffers from "sins of commission as well as omission" and is "uneven," with the core of the book offering more nuanced assessments than the opening and closing. Moss' review, more specifically, takes issue with *Reckless'* coverage of Operation Pennsylvania and Operation Lam Son 719 and some of Brigham's sourcing decisions. Nichter also suggests that *Reckless* is ultimately "not convincing" because "Brigham focuses on too many issues that are not important while overlooking too many issues that are."

The reality that Kissinger is still alive and actively seeking to influence the history written about the events in which he played a principle role is apparent in each of these reviews. Whereas Schmitz and Laderman commend Brigham for dispelling some of Kissinger's own mythmaking, Nichter challenges Brigham's approach and argues—based on a "recent meeting" with Kissinger—that the National Security Adviser "did not have nearly the freedom of action that Brigham assumes he did." While Sarah Snyder has recently reminded us that there were important limits to Kissinger's influence, Brigham makes a persuasive case that Kissinger believed he was the only man who could achieve peace with honor and, based on this assumption, did everything he could to consolidate policymaking in the White House at the expense of the rest of the U.S. foreign policy bureaucracy.[4] That both Kissinger's underlying assumptions and his methods were flawed, Brigham argues, is part of the tragedy.

Whether offering praise or disapprobation, a third common thread in each of the following reviews is the desire for more. While some roundtable participants would have liked to have seen Brigham expand his coverage of events that appear briefly in the text, others note that inclusion of non-Vietnam related concerns would have provided greater context. I also wonder how expanding the book's temporal scope to incorporate Kissinger's involvement in planning the U.S. evacuation from Saigon in April 1975 would have impacted *Reckless'* narrative. Brigham acknowledges that this desire for an expanded "portrait of Kissinger" is a "fair critique" and the inevitable result of writing "a trade press book…with a strict word limit."

Although the participants in this roundtable disagree vociferously about many aspects of Brigham's new book, the points of consensus demonstrate resoundingly that *Reckless* is an accessible, necessary intervention that revisits well-tread topics in new and provocative ways. Indeed, despite his many criticisms, Nichter describes *Reckless* as "the first in a new genre" and suggests "we will be talking about this book, and others it will prompt, for many years." While the scholarly debates about Kissinger and his legacy are far from settled, then, it is clear that moving forward such discussions will be incomplete without serious engagement with *Reckless*.

Notes:
1. Brigham, *Reckless, ix.*
2. Ibid, xi.
3. Ibid, xii.
4. Sarah B. Snyder, "Beyond 'The Architect,'" *Sources and Methods*, 23

July 2018, https://www.wilsoncenter.org/blog-post/beyond-the-architect?utm_content=buffer72e47&utm_medium=social&utm_source=twitter.com&utm_campaign=buffer.

Review of Robert K. Brigham, *Reckless: Henry Kissinger and the Tragedy of Vietnam*

Richard A. Moss[1]

As I read *Reckless: Henry Kissinger and the Tragedy of Vietnam*, I was torn between hope in the book's claim to be "the first to hold [Kissinger's] record to a scrupulous account based on his own definitions of success and the evidence provided by recently released material" (xi) and the dissonance I experienced as I dug into the details. This review focuses on the evolution of Kissinger's thinking about Vietnam, a sequencing error in *Reckless* on Operation Lam Son 719, and the Nixon tapes and Kissinger telephone conversation (telcon) transcripts related to Nixon and Kissinger's relationship.

First, an aside. I'm something of a one-trick pony in my relationship and exposure (by choice!) to the Nixon tapes. It was my day-job at the State Department to transcribe the tapes for inclusion in the official documentary record, the *Foreign Relations of the United States* series, for longer than was probably healthy (mentally or physically) or prudent. Adding to the exposure, I have used the tapes extensively in my own research since 2002, when the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) made public its Third Chronological Release (tapes recorded between January and June 1972).

Thanks to the tapes ("the gift that keeps on giving," per Bob Woodward), the copious telcon transcripts kept by Kissinger and others, the diaries of chief of staff H. R. "Bob" Haldeman, and the millions of pages of other textual records, the Nixon administration is one of the best-documented U.S. presidential administrations (if not *the* best-documented).[2] In these rich sources there is ample evidence to support one school of thought, which holds that Henry Kissinger was a self-aggrandizing, manipulative, scheming, emotional sycophant who was, arguably, guilty of war crimes during the Nixon and Ford administrations. Another school of thought, also supported by the documentary record, can claim that Kissinger was a principled, thoughtful, tireless public servant who sought peace and tried to improve America's position in the world vis-à-vis adversaries and allies alike. Contradictory traits exist in everybody to some degree, but the level to which they existed (and still exist) in Henry Kissinger make him a fascinating subject of inquiry, a kind of devious bogeyman to some, and a realist statesman and master diplomat to others.

By choosing a title like *Reckless* and adopting the tone of a prosecutor in a courtroom during the first and last parts of the book, Robert Brigham places himself more in the first school of thought. "For all his faults, Kissinger (no matter what) could not change reality on the ground," Brigham contends. "He made a bad situation worse, however, with his reckless assumptions about the use of force and diplomacy" (xii). For Brigham, "Kissinger was a careful reader of Spinoza and Kant, and he learned from both that history is tragedy, but that men of free will can bend history toward a new reality" (44). Channeling the Melian dialogue from Thucydides, "Kissinger naturally thought . . . that Moscow could easily influence events in Hanoi because he believed that the powerful do what they want and the weak suffer, as they must" (45). Brigham points out that Kissinger's prolific output—three volumes of memoirs, documentary collections, and foreign policy analyses—has been an attempt to shape (and distort) the historical record (93–94, 146). Perhaps Kissinger is living by Nixon's comment to him many decades ago: "Now, Henry, remember, we're gonna be around to outlive our enemies."[3]

Brigham provides a readable, entertaining account that will no doubt appeal to a broad audience. However, it is not a comprehensive account of the tragedy in Vietnam under Kissinger and the president he served. The book is uneven it its treatment of the subject; its first quarter and last chapter have a more argumentative tone, while the middle half of the book is more nuanced. The depiction of the twists and turns in U.S.-North Vietnamese negotiations in 1972 are particularly revealing. Unfortunately, some of the details throughout the book could be better sourced, and there are issues of omission as well as commission.

In his first chapter on the evolution of Kissinger's thinking about Vietnam, it is surprising that Brigham does not explore the role Kissinger played in Operation PENNSYLVANIA, an effort to bring Hanoi to the negotiating table in 1967 via two French intermediaries, Herbert Marcovich and Raymond Aubrac. Instead, Brigham focuses on the details surrounding Kissinger's first trip to South Vietnam in 1965.

For example, in his first chapter on the evolution of Kissinger's thinking about Vietnam, it is surprising that Brigham does not explore the role Kissinger played in Operation PENNSYLVANIA, an effort to bring Hanoi to the negotiating table in 1967 via two French intermediaries, Herbert Marcovich and Raymond Aubrac. Instead, Brigham focuses on the details surrounding Kissinger's first trip to South Vietnam in 1965 (15–21). The narrative then jumps from late 1965 to Kissinger's *Foreign Affairs* article in January 1969, as if little or nothing happened over the intervening three years.[4] While Brigham mentions Operation PENNSYLVANIA in the second chapter, it is only a passing reference to an initiative that "went nowhere" and to the fact that the relationship between Kissinger and Aubrac aided in setting up a back channel with North Vietnam in 1969 (57–58).

There should be little doubt that Operation PENNSYLVANIA served multiple purposes and showed an evolution of Kissinger's thinking on Vietnam. PENNSYLVANIA paved the way for what would become known as the "San Antonio Formula," after a speech (in San Antonio) in which President Johnson said that the United States would stop all aerial and naval bombardment of North Vietnam in exchange for peace negotiations.[5] It has been publicly known since 1968 that Kissinger promoted the San Antonio formula and was directly involved in the negotiations.[6] In the words of biographer Walter Isaacson, "Thus began Kissinger's first experience with secret diplomacy and his baptism into the difficulties of dealing with the North Vietnamese."[7]

In December 1967 Kissinger made a trip to Moscow under the auspices of the Soviet-American Disarmament Study group. Although separate from the failed negotiations of the summer of 1967, this trip was an attempt to revive the PENNSYLVANIA talks. It demonstrated that Kissinger had begun to develop his ideas for linkage between Moscow and Hanoi more than a full year before he became Nixon's national security advisor. U.S. documents released in 2008, coverage of this trip in Niall Ferguson's biography of Kissinger, and a 1992 memoir account by Soviet foreign policy expert Georgi Arbatov show that Kissinger came to believe that the road to peace in Vietnam went through Moscow.[8]

As Brigham argues, the idea that Moscow would try to persuade Hanoi to make meaningful concessions in negotiations with the United States out of a desire for progress on arms control and other areas of superpower relations was largely flawed. Ultimately, there would be no linkage. Kissinger "did not understand that for Moscow,

forcing Hanoi to concede its first principles carried with it unacceptable costs and risks" (45). Brigham contends that Anatoly Dobrynin, the Soviet ambassador to the United States and Kissinger's sparring partner in a secret back channel, was an "unwilling partner in the plan," and "neither would be happy with the result" (45).

While flawed, Kissinger's beliefs about Moscow were not *entirely* wrong. Moscow was Hanoi's primary patron, and the Kremlin had some influence with its client state. North Vietnam did not manufacture sophisticated surface-to-air missiles, jetfighters, and main battle tanks, and Moscow could (and occasionally did) moderate the flow of arms and materiel to Hanoi's war machine. Kissinger used "the Channel" with Dobrynin to pass messages to Hanoi, attempt to limit Soviet assistance to North Vietnam, and make it possible for Moscow and Washington to delink Vietnam from superpower relations with a successful and politically profitable summit meeting in Moscow in May 1972. Kissinger and Dobrynin built an institution that made an improvement in superpower relations possible, and they were largely pleased with the results. Kissinger solidified his power and that of the White House-based National Security Council (NSC) *vis-à-vis* the State and Defense departments, while Dobrynin became a member of the Central Committee.

Nevertheless, it took time to realize that there was a limit to how much influence a patron can exert on its clients. In a back-channel meeting after the North Vietnamese launched the Easter Offensive in 1972, Dobrynin remarked, "Isn't it amazing what a little country can do to wreck well-laid plans?" Kissinger replied, "The president wants you to know we will under no circumstances accept a defeat there and we will do what is necessary not to."[9] The eventual result was Linebacker and the mining of Haiphong Harbor. Both Washington and Moscow considered cancelling the Moscow summit; Washington because it saw Soviet aid to the North as facilitating the Easter Offensive, and Moscow because of ideological solidarity with Hanoi. The Kissinger-Dobrynin channel made possible the delinking of Vietnam from the larger issue of superpower relations.

Brigham describes several Kissinger-Dobrynin exchanges but, curiously, does not mention or cite *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969–1972*, jointly compiled, translated, and annotated by the U.S. Department of State and the Russian Foreign Ministry in 2007. This treasure trove includes both Kissinger and Dobrynin's accounts of their back-channel exchanges.[11] Dobrynin's contemporary observations of Kissinger would have enabled Brigham to avoid relying solely on Kissinger's reports of the meetings and probably would have bolstered some of his arguments.

In addition, Brigham's account of Operation Lam Son 719, the U.S.-backed South Vietnamese incursion into Laos in 1971, could use more detail. Brigham does a good job of describing the operation, but the inclusion of a map or two showing the geography of the area would be very helpful, and photographs, say, of South Vietnamese troops clinging to helicopter skids, would have added a lot to his well-written descriptions. Also, sourcing is again an issue. Brigham mentions that Kissinger "had recent intelligence estimates suggesting Hanoi's strength in the area was nearly twenty-five thousand troops and that two more North Vietnamese divisions were likely to arrive soon" (141). However, there is no source provided for this statement.

In the same paragraph, Brigham describes how General William Westmoreland, then Army chief of staff and formerly the U.S. commander in Vietnam, told Kissinger that Operation Lam Son 719 "was too complex, required too much close air coordination and communication, for the ARVN to be successful (141–42)." In view of the (uncited) intelligence he received and the advice he got from an experienced military commander, it would seem that Kissinger should have known the raid would fail. However, the Westmoreland conversation took place in April 1971. It was a postmortem of the operation, not an advance warning.

The formula that Kissinger was wrong and should have known better is a little too much like Monday morning quarterbacking for my taste. Brigham repeatedly mentions that North Vietnam was going to settle the conflict by force of arms, and yet Kissinger continued to negotiate and gradually eroded the U.S. conditions.

The formula that Kissinger was wrong and should have known better is a little too much like Monday morning quarterbacking for my taste. Brigham repeatedly mentions that North Vietnam was going to settle the conflict by force of arms, and yet Kissinger continued to negotiate and gradually eroded the U.S. conditions. Boxed in by the realities on the ground and Nixon's desire to Vietnamize the war, what were the alternatives to using force? Politics is the art of the possible. Hanoi seemed willing to accept nothing less than a complete withdrawal of American forces, but that was probably beyond the realm of the possible for a conservative Republican administration. Therein lay a Catch-22. The recent past was no guide, either. The United States had not unilaterally withdrawn from Korea, and American forces remain on the Korean Peninsula today, nearly seven decades after a ceasefire. Did Kissinger and Nixon consider a similar solution for Vietnam? Aside from criticizing the escalation policies, perhaps Brigham could have explored this possibility or others.[12]

Brigham is generally correct about the fallout from the India-Pakistan war, the leak of sensitive crisis-response documents to investigative journalist Jack Anderson, and the subsequent discovery by the Plumbers (of Watergate ignominy) that the military was spying on the (NSC) (160–64). The Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) received information via a Navy yeoman, Charles Radford, who was assigned to the JCS-NSC liaison office. Brigham appears to have fallen prey to Kissinger's explanation in his memoir that he was "out of favor" with Nixon for "several weeks" after the India-Pakistan war and the Moorer-Radford affair, as it was called. In *White House Years*, Kissinger stresses that the disagreement between him and the president was less about substance on the India-Pakistan crisis and more about Nixon's public relations attempts to deflect blame: "The result was

Millions of US Dollars

	1968	1969	1970	1971	1972	1973*	1968-73
USSR	415	175	90	160	355	150	1,345
PRC	115	140	100	110	215	100	780
Total	530	315	190	270	570	250	2,125

* Preliminary

CIA Estimate of Soviet and Chinese military aid to North Vietnam, 1968–1973[10]

an effort by the White House public relations experts to deflect onto me the attack on our conduct during the India-Pakistan crisis. The policy became my policy. For several weeks Nixon was unavailable to me. Ziegler made no statement of support, nor did he deny press accounts that I was out of favor."

Alluding to the Anderson leaks, Kissinger contended that "the departments were not admonished to cease their leaking against me. Nixon could not resist the temptation of letting me twist slowly, slowly in the wind."[13] Yeoman Radford admitted taking documents and passing them to the JCS but denied being the source of the leak under repeated questioning sessions, including polygraph examinations. Anderson went to his grave in 2005 without revealing his source, but he told one author that "you don't get those kind of secrets from enlisted men. You only get them from generals and admirals."[14]

Nixon worried aloud about Kissinger suffering an emotional collapse at the end of 1971 and decided almost immediately to give him a boost. He made that decision not because of Vietnam, but rather because of the larger role Kissinger played in the administration. He could not afford to lose him with the summit meeting in the Soviet Union and the opening to the People's Republic of China coming up, both of which had been announced before India and Pakistan blew up. During a dramatic Christmas Eve conversation, Nixon told his chief domestic advisor, John Ehrlichman, that "[Kissinger] is extremely valuable to us. He is indispensable at this point because of the China trip . . . and to a lesser extent the Russia trip."[15] Two hours later, Nixon asked Kissinger's former benefactor, Nelson Rockefeller, to reassure Kissinger and, somewhat awkwardly, to wish the Jewish Kissinger a Merry Christmas. "Tell him to pay no attention to this nitpicking by people how we handled it," the president told Rockefeller.[16]

Getting back to Vietnam, Brigham claims that Nixon "kept Kissinger at arm's length about the content of his Vietnam speech right up until January 12, [1972,] when he asked for Kissinger's advice in advance of his troop withdrawal announcement now scheduled for January 13" (164). Unfortunately, Brigham is factually incorrect on this point, and the telcon he cites for January 12, 1972, does not support the claim that Nixon was holding Kissinger at arm's length at that time (165, 271).[17] The idea of splitting up the announcement about the peace plan and the announcement of the withdrawal of 70,000 more American troops and instead, discussing Vietnam in the State of the Union address and later making a separate announcement that Kissinger had been negotiating secretly with the North Vietnamese for thirty months was not Nixon's, and Kissinger was not in the dark. In fact, Kissinger is the one who recommended precisely this course of action to Nixon in a phone call captured by Nixon's taping system on New Year's Day 1972:

> **Kissinger:** Mr. President, I have had this idea for your consideration. I've already gone ahead with [Ambassador Ellsworth] Bunker and everything is moving for the earliest date [on the troop withdrawal announcement] you want to go, so—
> **Nixon:** Yeah.
> **Kissinger**: —so nothing is blowing up. Whether we mightn't split the troop announcement and the peace plan? In other words, do the troop announcement before Congress comes back, and hit them with the peace plan right after your State of the Union?
> **Nixon:** Yes, we could do that.

After debating the pros and cons of doing the troop announcement at different times and speculating about the play it would receive in the press, the president and his national security advisor came back to the sequence of announcements:

> **Kissinger:** For the first two or three weeks it's going to go like the ceasefire. For the first two or three weeks it will sweep everything.
> **Nixon:** Yeah.
> **Kissinger:** And therefore, it isn't all that disadvantageous supposing they come in with the Mansfield amendment again.
> **Nixon:** Yeah.
> **Kissinger:** We can prove we made these proposals before they ever did.
> **Nixon:** Yeah.
> **Kissinger:** So, and then we could say, make the peace plan, just for an example, around the 25th [of January].
> **Nixon:** Um-hmm.
> **Kissinger:** Then you'd have two weeks of riding that.
> **Nixon:** Um-hmm.
> **Kissinger:** Then we come out with the foreign policy report.[18] Then you're going to China.[19] Then you're in the middle of March. And then it's—
> **Nixon:** Mmm. Yeah?
> **Kissinger:** That's the advantage of doing the peace plan a little later. While, otherwise, they might come back at you with a full-scale attack before you go to China.
> **Nixon:** Um-hmm. Um-hmm.
> **Kissinger:** I have no problem with ever—whatever, with making the troop announcement as early as possible.
> **Nixon:** No, there's no problem on that.

Nixon agreed with Kissinger's suggestion to have a separate, televised announcement of the peace plan that the administration had put forward in secret channels; it would come after the State of the Union and the troop withdrawal announcement. The men also explored the possibility of mentioning the administration's shift to avoid using draftees in Vietnam:

> **Nixon:** I would like if we could do the troop announcement and the draftees, uh, then it should be done separately from the State of the Union, I think…I'd like to have the State of the Union—we're going to get so much foreign policy—
> **Kissinger:** That's right.
> **Nixon:** —benefit from other things that I think we'd better—
> **Kissinger:** I think if you have the troop announcements before—
> **Nixon:** Yeah.
> **Kissinger:** —then the State of the Union domestic, then the peace plan right after the foreign policy after the State of the Union, say the week after—
> **Nixon:** See, I will just say in the State of the Union that I am going to make a major report, "I'm going to make a report to the Congress on foreign policy on blank, and I will not cover it in this speech." Just as I have before.
> **Kissinger:** Yeah. Right, and we will have it ready this time on the 8th [of January].
> **Nixon:** Yeah.

Kissinger suggested January 25th as the date to make

the peace plan announcement, which is what Nixon ended up doing. Nixon was less receptive to Kissinger's seemingly serious suggestion to cut Secretary of Defense Melvin Laird out of the details:

> **Kissinger:** Ah, ah, Mr. President, I have almost reached the point where you may have to do this without telling Laird beforehand.
> **Nixon:** Whoa! Couldn't do that, Henry, he'd go up, he'd just—
> **Kissinger:** He'd go up the wall.
> **Nixon:** Yeah.
> **Kissinger:** But, uh—
> **Nixon:** But you're afraid he's going to leak it out, huh?
> **Kissinger:** But I'm afraid he's going to come back with so many caveats. Let me talk to Moorer; he owes us one.[20]

To be fair, there were no telephone conversation transcripts of this important conversation. However, the audio for conversation has been available since the Third Chronological Release of 2003 and was listed online in 2008 at http://nixontapes.org/hak.html. (The website includes digital audio of each conversation, NARA-produced finding aids, and lists which taped conversations overlapped with telcons.) In addition, the Digital National Security Archive has a comprehensive collection of Kissinger telcons and Nixon-Kissinger conversations from the Nixon tapes available through its subscription service at ProQuest.[21]

This brings up a minor point, but one that is revealing. Brigham cites the Kissinger telephone conversation transcripts as "White House Tapes." Like the White House tapes, the telcons have a fascinating history, but they are an entirely separate collection. Moreover, the telcons were processed in a unique way and thus differ from many other textual records and the White House tapes.[22] According to the NARA finding aid, secretaries initially listened to Kissinger's phone calls on a "dead key" extension and made summaries of conversations, although this practice evolved into verbatim transcripts written up from shorthand notes. Many conversations were recorded, but the tapes were immediately transcribed and then destroyed or reused.[23] Therefore, citing the telcons as "White House Tapes" simply is not accurate.

Despite the issues outlined above, I believe *Reckless* adds to the debate over the tragedy of U.S. involvement in Vietnam, an "argument without end," as Robert McNamara and others put it. If Brigham spurs public discourse on issues of war and peace and morality, all the better. He is spot on when he says that nearly as many Americans died with Nixon and Kissinger at the helm of the ship of state as during the Johnson years, and the prolongation of the war was a tragedy for Americans and Vietnamese alike. Further, Brigham is an engaging writer, and *Reckless* was enjoyable to read. Its shortcomings should serve as a reminder for historians to properly caveat and contextualize their sources but always remain open to engage.

Notes:
1. The thoughts and opinions expressed in this publication, in addition to any mistakes, are those of the author and are not necessarily those of the U.S. government or its components.
2. The quote that the Nixon tapes are "the gift that keeps on giving" is widely attributed to investigative reporter Bob Woodward, of Watergate fame, who apparently listens to the tapes as he drives. Bob Woodward, "Landon Lecture" (Kansas State University, Manhattan, KS, March 29, 2000). http://www.mediarelations.k-state.edu/newsreleases/landonlect/woodwardtext300.html.
3. Nixon Tapes (NT), Oval Office Conversation No. 823–1 between Nixon and Kissinger, December 14, 1972. This is the same conversation in which Nixon decided to go through with the "Christmas Bombing" against North Vietnam.
4. Henry A. Kissinger, "The Viet Nam Negotiations," *Foreign Affairs* 47, no. 2 (January 1969).
5. Lyndon B. Johnson, "Speech before the National Legislative Conference in San Antonio, Texas," September 29, 1967, *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: Lyndon B. Johnson*, 1967, Book II (Washington DC: Govt. Printing Office, 1967), 876–81.
6. David Kraslow and Stuart Loory, "The Secret Search for Peace: Unheralded Emissaries Opened Way to Hanoi," *Los Angeles Times*, April 4, 1968. See also Hedrick Smith, "Frenchmen Took U.S. Plan to Hanoi: Harvard Professor Linked Them and Washington," *The New York Times,* April 9, 1968. A profile of Kissinger when he became national security advisor noted his earlier experience with the French intermediaries and Hanoi. Patrick Anderson, "The Only Power Kissinger Has Is the Confidence of the President," *New York Times Magazine*, June 1, 1969, 42. Kraslow and Loory were onto the story as early as December 1967. In a "Memorandum for the Record," Benjamin Read wrote that "Kissinger phoned to advise me that he had received a letter from . . . Marcovich in which M[arcovich] states that *LA Times* reporter Kraslow has been 'after me.'" December 11, 1967, Lyndon B. Johnson Library, Austin, TX (LBJL), National Security File (NSF), Vietnam Country File, Box 140.
7. Walter Isaacson, *Kissinger: A Biography* (New York, 1992), 121.
8. Letter from Herbert Marcovich to Henry Kissinger, December 6, 1967, LBJL, NSF, Vietnam Country File, Box 140; Telegram 8604 from Kissinger at American Embassy in Paris to Secretary of State Rusk, "Conversations in Moscow," January 4, 1968, 10:09 a.m. (Paris time), LBJL, NSF, Vietnam Country File, Box 140; Kissinger-Read Telephone Conversation, January 17, 1968, 7:30 a.m., LBJL, NSF, Vietnam Country File, Box 140; "Memorandum from Walt W. Rostow to Lyndon B. Johnson," January 17, 1968, 10:10 a.m., LBJL, NSF, Vietnam Country File, Box 140. See also Niall Ferguson, *Kissinger: The Idealist, 1923–1968* (New York, 2015), 782–85; and Georgi Arbatov, *The System: An Insider's Life in Soviet Politics* (New York, 1992), 178.
9. Nixon-Kissinger Telcon, April 3, 1972, 6:20 p.m., Kissinger Telcons (HAK Telcons), Richard Nixon Presidential Library and Museum, Yorba Linda, CA (RNPLM).
10. CIA, "Memorandum [Redacted] Soviet and Chinese Aid to North Vietnam [Redacted]," April 10, 1974, released August 22, 2005. https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP-85T00875R001900020062-8.pdf.
11. U.S. Department of State, *Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969–1972*, Introductions by Henry A. Kissinger and Anatoly Dobrynin (Washington DC, Govt. Printing Office, 2007).
12. Brigham mentions North Vietnamese concerns that the United States intended to stay in South Vietnam as it had in South Korea (193-194), but there is no discussion of whether or not the Nixon administration ever considered a Korea-like solution.
13. Kissinger, *White House Years* (Boston, 1979), 853, 854, 864, 861, 867, 913, 918.
14. James Rosen, "The Men Who Spied on Nixon: New Detail Reveal Extent of Moorer-Radford Affair." Fox News, December 15, 2008. www.foxnews.com/politics/2008/12/15/men-spied-nixon-new-details-reveal-extent-moorer-radford-affair/.
15. NT, Executive Office Building Conversation No. 309–1 between Nixon, Ehrlichman, and Haldeman, December 24, 1971.
16. NT, White House Telephone (WHT) Conversation No. 17–13 between Nixon and Rockefeller, December 24, 1971.
17. Nixon-Kissinger Telcon, January 12, 1972, 12:20pm, HAK Telcons, RNPLM.
18. "U.S. Foreign Policy for the 1970s: The Emerging Structure of Peace; A Report to the Congress by Richard Nixon, President of the United States, February 9, 1972." *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: Richard Nixon, 1972* (Washington DC, Govt. Printing Office, 1974), 194–346. Also available in *FRUS, 1969–1976*, Vol. I, *Foundations of Foreign Policy, 1969–1972*, eds. Louis J. Smith and David H. Herschler (Washington D.C., 2003), doc. 104. https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76v01/d104.
19. Nixon visited China between February 21 and February 28, 1972.
20. NT, White House Telephone 17–132, January 1, 1972, 2:43 p.m.–3:56 p.m. http://nixontapes.org/hak/1972-01-01_Nixon_017-132.mp3. Don't trust my transcript excerpts—listen for yourself. James Rosen cited included several excerpts from this conversation in *The Strong Man: John Mitchell and the Secrets of Watergate* (New York, 2008).
21. See also "'Dr. Kissinger, Mr. President': Kissinger's Telcons

and Nixon's Tapes," National Security Archive Electronic Briefing Book No. 263—Part 2, ed. Richard Moss and Luke Nichter, December 24, 2008, https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB263/index2.htm. Brigham lists the telcons as "telecons." NARA lists the collection as "telcons" in official finding aids, as does the National Security Archive in its Digital National Security Archive (DNSA), available through ProQuest, https://proquest.libguides.com/dnsa/kissinger1. The DNSA has the complete collection available and is searchable by keyword. Lastly, a Google search for "Kissinger telecons" returns results for "Kissinger telcons."
22. The Kissinger telcons were originally deposited in the Library of Congress, Manuscript Division rather than the National Archives, with telcons from Kissinger's tenure as secretary of state held by and processed for declassification by the Department of State. The White House tapes were processed in accordance with the Presidential Recording and Materials Preservation Act, signed into law by President Gerald R. Ford on December 19, 1974. See Richard Nixon Presidential Library and Museum, "White House Tapes," https://www.nixonlibrary.gov/white-house-tapes.
23. NARA, "Henry A. Kissinger Telephone Conversation Transcripts [Finding Aid]," May 2004, online at the National Security Archive, https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB123/telcon-finding%20aid.pdf.

Kissinger the Incompetent

Scott Laderman

The last two decades have witnessed a virtual explosion of scholarship on Henry Kissinger, who must register as the most polarizing figure in twentieth-century American diplomacy.[1] Kissinger has of course always commanded attention in the historical literature, though usually alongside Richard Nixon. Just consider the number of books in which the words "Nixon, Kissinger, and…" appear in the title or subtitle.[2] Along these same lines, Kissinger features prominently in a number of important works exploring the Nixon administration and the Vietnam War.[3]

Yet very little of that literature has placed Kissinger at its center, which is quite surprising when one considers that the Paris Peace Accords apparently count among his greatest triumphs—so much so, in fact, that he, along with the Vietnamese revolutionary Le Duc Tho, was awarded the 1973 Nobel Peace Prize for his role in negotiating the agreement. (Tho had the decency to turn the prize down, explaining that "peace has not yet really been established in South Vietnam."[4])

Robert Brigham's *Reckless* makes a compelling case that Kissinger's role in the Indochina wars is undeserving of any accolades. When Kissinger accepted the offer to serve as national security adviser in the new Nixon administration, he shared with the president a pessimism about the war and a desire "to move on to what they considered more important foreign policy issues, such as arms limitations with the Soviets" (11). But the war could not be ignored. To end it, Nixon and Kissinger would pursue what the former called "peace with honor." What this meant was not entirely clear. In the run-up to the 1968 election, Nixon had proved masterful at speaking out of both sides of his mouth. Those championing a military victory over the Vietnamese revolutionaries interpreted Nixon's comments on the war favorably. He was with them, they believed. Yet those calling for an American withdrawal heard something quite different: Nixon wanted out.

The challenge for the new administration was how to continue to seek victory in Vietnam while appeasing growing antiwar sentiment in the United States. The solution, according to Nixon, was "Vietnamization." The term itself is flawed, as it suggests that the war had been "American" until then. Hundreds of thousands of Vietnamese corpses suggest otherwise. But the idea, which had been pushed by Defense Secretary Melvin Laird (29–30), was a compromise of sorts. (Brigham argues that Kissinger did everything possible to marginalize Laird and Secretary of State William Rogers, greatly enlarging the staff of his National Security Council and essentially conducting policy in secret [65–66].) It appeared to meet Congress's and the American public's desire for an end to the war by gradually withdrawing American ground troops. This would allow time for the administration to achieve victory through an escalation of the air war, in neutral Cambodia as well as the north, and increased training of ARVN forces. The goal was to enable the Saigon regime to successfully repel the revolutionary insurgency and, with American assistance, survive. Both Nixon and Kissinger felt its survival was essential to American "credibility."

While Kissinger shared the goal of a viable Saigon government, he hated Vietnamization. He believed that divorcing military operations and diplomacy in Vietnam had been a problem in earlier years (11), and he thus saw the presence of U.S. troops as a lever to push the revolutionaries to concede to American demands. Their voluntary withdrawal, Kissinger worried, undermined what little leverage Washington enjoyed. "How," Brigham asks, "could U.S. negotiators demand a mutual withdrawal of U.S. and North Vietnamese troops from South Vietnam if the United States was going to withdraw its troops anyway because of domestic political pressure" (27–28)? But Kissinger consistently failed to appreciate the American political realities, Brigham notes, including the need to demonstrate to a frustrated Congress and public that the war was not without end. What Kissinger needed, then, were other ways of illustrating to the revolutionaries the U.S. commitment to a military victory. Initially this meant the "secret" bombing of Cambodia.

As we now know, the United States had in fact been bombing Cambodia since at least 1965.[5] But the bombing campaign that Nixon and Kissinger pursued in 1969, which was dubbed Operation Menu, was a tremendous escalation, and the consequences of using B-52s to ultimately carpet-bomb the country were devastating. (Kissinger, Brigham writes, "felt no moral qualms" about it [42].) The devastation was immediate for the tens of thousands of Cambodians who lost their lives, of course. But the bombing was also devastating in the longer term. Ben Kiernan and others have compellingly argued that the American bombing from 1969 to 1973 was "probably the most important single factor in Pol Pot's rise."[6] Readers of *Passport* are well aware of what that rise meant, with the Khmer Rouge genocide, according to leading estimates, killing approximately a fifth to a quarter of the Cambodian population, or 1.67 to 1.87 million people.[7] That horrific loss of life must count among Henry Kissinger's legacies.

When Nixon and Kissinger launched the U.S. "incursion" into Cambodia in 1970, the widespread domestic opposition that followed apparently surprised Kissinger, only further underscoring his tin ear when it came to American politics. He was also taken aback by the reaction to the "Christmas bombing" in December 1972, which met with outrage both across the United States and around the world. The growing call to end the war following the Lam Son 719 operation in Laos seemed to surprise him, too (146–47).

The Kissinger that appears in *Reckless* is less a shrewd diplomat than an incompetent opportunist. He is not a brilliant strategist or global theorist. Nor is he an "idealist," as Niall Ferguson would have it. Rather, he comes across as an ambitious and amoral climber who thought "his strategic compass pointed truer than most" (21), and he was looking to secure his place in the pantheon of great statesmen. (Whence this "self-confidence" in his abilities derived is "not entirely clear," Brigham adds cuttingly [25].) To get there, he repeatedly played to the president's insecurities (139) and misled him about the nature of his

negotiations in Paris (93, 98, 100, 128, 194) and later, Saigon (221, 231). And as Brigham reveals, Kissinger showed no interest in the concerns of others.

This is most evident in his treatment of the RVN authorities. Brigham makes it clear that, whether out of arrogance, racist contempt, or indifference, Kissinger made no effort to consult with RVN officials in Saigon while negotiating the fate of their U.S.-backed government with Hanoi (99, 155, 196, 207). Indeed, he "purposefully kept Saigon in the dark" (103). He had no appreciation for the complicated politics in the south, including the considerable support for a "third force" (83–84).[8] He seemed not to care about South Vietnam at all. He believed "coercive power" (85) would force Hanoi's hand in the negotiations, and he seemed totally uninterested in exploring more creative terms that took Vietnamese political realities into account. While for years Kissinger did insist on the preservation of the RVN regime in the face of Hanoi's insistence that it be dissolved, he appeared to do so for the sake of American credibility. He worried about what the regime's overthrow might suggest about American power and security guarantees.

It was with both this global credibility and the domestic American reaction in mind that Kissinger and Nixon, by most accounts, insisted by the end on a "decent interval" between the U.S. military withdrawal and what was assumed to be the inevitable demise of the Saigon government. Brigham recognizes the idea of the "decent interval" (149–52), but despite acknowledging the evidence suggesting its explanatory force, he seems unconvinced. "Perhaps" Kissinger pursued it, he writes (215). Brigham explains that the national security adviser miscalculated (202), but he acknowledges that Kissinger did concede that "our terms will eventually destroy" RVN president Nguyen Van Thieu (213). Brigham even calls Hanoi's overthrow of the Saigon government a "practical outgrowth" of the eventual settlement, with Kissinger telling Le Duc Tho that the United States was "prepared to start a process in which, as a result of local forces, change can occur" (218). Kissinger, moreover, "did not believe" that "[t]he South is strong enough to defend itself," according to Brigham, and he warned Nixon that "this thing [i.e., the Paris settlement] is almost certain to blow up sooner or later" (235, 242).

So why the hedging on the decent interval? And a related question: Given Nixon's concordance with his national security adviser's apparent embrace of the decent interval, we might ask, in light of Brigham's other findings, whether it in any way resulted from his being misled by Kissinger?

Reckless is an important book that fills a surprising gap in the literature. Its great strength lies in its tight focus on Henry Kissinger and the Vietnam War. Ironically enough, however, that is also its principal shortcoming. The Kissinger in this study seems almost singularly concerned with events in Southeast Asia. We read very little about his involvement elsewhere. It was of course not necessary to write about Kissinger and the world. Other authors have and will continue to do that. But thinking about Kissinger and, say, East Pakistan (Bangladesh) when considering his and Nixon's stated desire to prevent widespread revolutionary atrocities in Vietnam could have been helpful. Brigham does mention the genocide on the Indian subcontinent (161–62), but only in the context of Nixon's diminishing confidence in Kissinger, who Nixon believed had steered him wrongly on the issue. Kissinger's support for despots and genocidaires outside Vietnam could have provided important context for addressing the "bloodbath theory" that the Nixon administration quite publicly posited.

While scathing in its portrait of Henry Kissinger, Brigham's book operates within certain frames of reference, including the assumption that by the 1970s "South Vietnam" had become a legitimate entity worth preserving. Some critics will take issue with this. Brigham does not hesitate to recognize the corruption and unpopularity of the RVN government, but he writes that there was a growing consciousness of a South Vietnamese identity that led to "a strong sense of cultural and political identification with the state," even if people in the south were "dubious about its leadership."

Here Brigham is referring to notable recent scholarship that more fully addresses the complexities of southern society in the late 1960s and 1970s.[9] Within this context, Brigham concludes, the plan negotiated by Kissinger "was more than a betrayal of a corrupt Saigon government"; it represented "the abandonment of all of South Vietnam" (225). Kissinger, like others in the administration, cast the South Vietnamese "as passive actors in their own history, one of the greatest tragedies of the Vietnam War" (155). For Brigham, this ultimate betrayal of South Vietnam "raises serious questions about the efficacy and morality of pursuing a war for political means that are then surrendered" (220).

Whatever one might think of the war, the division of Vietnam, and the Nixon administration, these are serious and important points. They call into question the myth of Kissinger—which Kissinger himself studiously helped to foster—as the man who successfully achieved "peace with honor" in Vietnam. Brigham may not go as far as others in painting Kissinger as an unrepentant war criminal who ought to be behind bars, but his excellent new study does force readers to question the grotesque spectacle of Kissinger still being toasted on the Washington cocktail circuit.

Notes:

1. Mario Del Pero, *The Eccentric Realist: Henry Kissinger and the Shaping of American Foreign Policy* (Ithaca, New York, 2010); Niall Ferguson, *Kissinger,* vol. 1, *1923–1968: The Idealist* (New York, 2015); Greg Grandin, *Kissinger's Shadow: The Long Reach of America's Most Controversial Statesman* (New York, 2015); Jussi M. Hanhimäki, *The Flawed Architect: Henry Kissinger and American Foreign Policy* (Oxford, UK, 2004); Christopher Hitchens, *The Trial of Henry Kissinger* (London, 2001); Alistair Horne, *Kissinger: 1973, the Crucial Year* (New York, 2009); Jeremi Suri, *Henry Kissinger and the American Century* (Cambridge, MA, 2007); Hanes Walton Jr., Robert Louis Stevenson, and James Bernard Rosser Sr., eds., *The African Foreign Policy of Secretary of State Henry Kissinger: A Documentary Analysis* (Lanham, MD, 2007).
2. For examples from the last decade, see Roham Alvandi, *Nixon, Kissinger, and the Shah: The United States and Iran in the Cold War* (Oxford, UK, 2014); Gary Bass, *The Blood Telegram: Nixon, Kissinger, and a Forgotten Genocide* (New York, 2013); Yukinore Komine, *Secrecy in U.S. Foreign Policy: Nixon, Kissinger, and the Rapprochement with China* (London, 2016); Lubna Z. Qureshi, *Nixon, Kissinger, and Allende: U.S. Involvement in the 1973 Coup in Chile* (Lanham, MD, 2009); and Asaf Siniver, *Nixon, Kissinger, and U.S. Foreign Policy Making: The Machinery of Crisis* (Cambridge, UK, 2011).
3. Pierre Asselin, *A Bitter Peace: Washington, Hanoi, and the Making of the Paris Agreement* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2002); Larry Berman, *No Peace, No Honor: Nixon, Kissinger, and Betrayal in Vietnam* (New York, 2001); Gregory A. Daddis, *Withdrawal: Reassessing America's*

Final Years in Vietnam (Oxford, UK, 2017); Johannes Kadura, *The War After the War: The Struggle for Credibility During America's Exit from Vietnam* (Ithaca, New York, 2016); Jeffrey Kimball, *Nixon's Vietnam War* (Lawrence, KS, 1998); and David F. Schmitz, *Richard Nixon and the Vietnam War: The End of the American Century* (Lanham, MD, 2014).

4. Flora Lewis, "Tho Rejects Nobel Prize, Citing Vietnam Situation," *New York Times*, October 24, 1973.

5. Taylor Owen and Ben Kiernan, "Bombs Over Cambodia," *The Walrus* (October 2006): 62–69; Taylor Owen and Ben Kiernan, "Bombs Over Cambodia: New Light on U.S. Air War," *Asia-Pacific Journal: Japan Focus* 5:5 (May 2, 2007): 2.

6. Ben Kiernan, *The Pol Pot Regime: Race, Power, and Genocide in Cambodia under the Khmer Rouge, 1975–79* (New Haven, CT, 1996), 16.

7. Ben Kiernan, "The Demography of Genocide in Southeast Asia: The Death Tolls in Cambodia, 1975–79, and East Timor, 1975–80," *Critical Asian Studies* 35:4 (December 2003): 585–87.

8. For a longer view of the "third force," see Sophie Quinn-Judge, *The Third Force in the Vietnam War: The Elusive Search for Peace, 1954–1975* (London, 2017).

9. See, for example, Sean Fear, "How South Vietnam Defeated Itself," *New York Times*, February 23, 2018, at www.nytimes.com/2018/02/23/opinion/how-south-vietnam-defeated-itself.html; Van Nguyen-Marshall, "Student Activism in Time of War: Youth in the Republic of Vietnam, 1960s–1970s," *Journal of Vietnamese Studies* 10:2 (2015): 43–81; and Ngo Vinh Long, "Legacies Foretold: Excavating the Roots of Postwar Viet Nam," in *Four Decades On: Vietnam, the United States, and the Legacies of the Second Indochina War*, ed. Scott Laderman and Edwin A. Martini (Durham, NC, 2013), 16–43.

Review of Robert Brigham, *Reckless: Henry Kissinger and the Tragedy of Vietnam*

Luke A. Nichter

With *Reckless: Henry Kissinger and the Tragedy of Vietnam*, Robert Brigham has given scholars a great gift. We will be talking about this book, and others it will prompt, for many years. Henry Kissinger, one of the most significant secretaries of state in American history, has long been deserving of a fair-minded critique. Neither the polemicists nor the memoir accounts will stand the test of time. There is arguably no one else in American history who served in government for such a short time and left a legacy that is debated with such passion. That passion continues to be fueled by the fact that more than four decades after he left office, Henry Alfred Kissinger is still active at nearly a century old. Complicating scholarly efforts even further, newly declassified documents, tapes, and foreign sources continue to become available to scholars at a staggering rate, and it takes serious effort simply to keep up with these releases.

Brigham's highly readable book has an immensely ambitious agenda despite containing only six chronological chapters and under 250 pages of text. The volume tells the story of Kissinger's management of the Vietnam War, which, Brigham says, "remains Kissinger's most enduring foreign policy legacy." He adds that his book "is the first to hold [Kissinger's] record to a scrupulous account based on his own definitions of success" (xi). One does not need to look much beyond the work's title, *Reckless*, to locate the author's main conclusion: "It was a total failure. . . . Kissinger failed in each of his stated goals, to achieve 'peace with honor'" (xi).

Brigham goes on to note twelve specific ways in which Kissinger failed, exuberantly using some form of the word "failure" thirteen times in two paragraphs (xi). The book's bottom-line assessment is that he "did much more harm than good. . . . Kissinger (no matter what) could not change reality on the ground. He made a bad situation worse, however, with his reckless assumption about the use of force and diplomacy" (xii). One day, when all the documents and tapes are released, Brigham's assessment might become the conventional wisdom. However, the presentation in this volume is not convincing for a variety of reasons.

The first chapter, "The Apprentice," summarizes Kissinger's activities during the 1960s and how he felt his way into the Vietnam issue prior to being appointed Nixon's national security adviser in late 1968. The book unquestioningly incorporates too much from previous works. Of Nixon's campaign headquarters, Brigham says, "The Pierre [Hotel in Manhattan] was an unlikely place for the president-elect to have his transition headquarters, given its ties to the East Coast establishment that Nixon so despised" (1). A more thoughtful assessment could have considered whether it was the obvious location for someone who had practiced law in New York since his defeat in the 1962 California governor's race. The neighborhood is full of private clubs with memberships dominated by Republicans, such as the Links Club, where influential New Yorkers met in early 1968 and agreed to support Eisenhower's loyal former vice president. To them, the bi-coastal Nixon was the only acceptable compromise between the Dewey-Lodge-Rockefeller wing of the party, on the one side, and the Taft-Goldwater-Reagan wing on the other.

Nixon and Kissinger charted their own courses during the decade, each honing their foreign policy credentials. Nixon took twice as many trips to Vietnam as Kissinger, although the latter, with multiple trips under his belt, was no slouch. Although they moved in different circles, they did have a link between them that—in a major oversight—has been overlooked: Henry Cabot Lodge, Jr. The liberal Republican from Massachusetts, who, despite Brigham's claim, was not a "presidential hopeful" (15), served in Vietnam and worked on related issues in more roles and for a longer period of time than any contemporary. Lodge was ambassador in 1963–1964 and again from 1965 to 1967, served as a consultant between his tours and after, and was appointed to lead the Paris peace talks when the Nixon administration took office on January 20, 1969.

Kissinger was close to Lodge's son George and quietly endorsed his ill-fated 1962 Senate run against another political newcomer with a famous last name, Edward M. Kennedy. Lodge hosted Nixon's visits to Saigon in the wilderness years and gave Kissinger his first Vietnam experience, as Lodge's consultant, in the autumn of 1965. It was in these years that Nixon's thinking on Vietnam matured, through trip after trip. His thoughts are documented in extensive notes handwritten on his ubiquitous yellow legal pads. Entries from a 1967 trip to Vietnam, just a year before Kissinger's appointment, are particularly noteworthy and offer a kind of blueprint for his eventual Vietnam policy.

The book's sparse coverage of Nixon's and Kissinger's activities in the 1960s and of tumultuous changes at home and in both major political parties makes it feel less like something Brigham worked on for fifteen years than a hasty 125,000-word response to Niall Ferguson's first volume in his biography of Kissinger.[1] This weakness is on full display in his coverage of the pivotal year of 1968. Brigham raises the old canard that Kissinger leaked secret information about the Johnson administration's negotiating position without identifying what it was, what was secret, what was significant, and whom it benefited (2). Kissinger was not for Nixon in 1968; he was for Nelson Rockefeller. In addition, according to conversations between this reviewer and former staff members of Vice President Hubert Humphrey, on two occasions Kissinger offered to serve as a consultant to the Humphrey campaign.

Brigham gets the politics of the October 31 bombing halt wrong.[2] Since he relies on sources that did no serious research on the so-called "Chennault Affair," he gets that wrong, too. Anna Chennault was a minor player who has

been elevated to a starring actress. She was not "a steadfast supporter of Republican politics and politicians" (4), nor was she ever part of Nixon's inner circle. In fact, she disagreed openly with his Vietnam and China policies. As someone who lost almost everything in her homeland as a result of the communist takeover of China in 1949, anticommunism was Chennault's key issue. The primary vehicles for her concerns were usually, but not always, Republicans critical of Truman's China policy, but she was also a strong supporter of Democrats such as Lyndon Johnson and Hubert Humphrey and offered to work for them as late as 1967. Chennault was more complex and more sophisticated than the capricious figure in the accounts Brigham and others unquestioningly accept.

There are statements in the book that illuminate why complicated figures such as Richard Nixon and Henry Kissinger have escaped nuanced biographical treatment. "It was not access to information that made Kissinger so appealing to Nixon," Brigham writes. "It was in equal measures Kissinger's understanding of power—Nixon believed that he needed Kissinger to shape and implement his broad foreign policy designs—and his willingness to make difficult decisions in the face of public pressure" (5). No, more significant was the fact that, during the 1960s, Nixon and Kissinger each made their own journeys, intellectually and globally. They were the only members of the loyal opposition to do so extensively, and they developed similar convictions about the importance of ending the domestic and international irritant of Vietnam so that the United States could resume constructive activity. Also, Brigham tells us that Nixon and Kissinger had "a profound disdain for bureaucracy" (7). Did other presidents love bureaucracy? Nixon and Kissinger "were outsiders who distrusted establishment liberals" (7). Then how does one explain that their rise to power occurred through their experiences as insiders, enabled by insiders, with Nixon having one of the most linear paths to the White House?

In Brigham's account of the Nixon White House years, not much is new. On the foundations of Nixon-Kissinger diplomacy, Richard Moss has done a better job. On Nixon's proto-Vietnam policy, Jeffrey Kimball has written more than anyone. On Kissinger's pre-White House years and how they affected his later thinking, there is Niall Ferguson. On Nixon's pre-presidential life, no one has been more thorough, and no one may ever be, than Irwin Gellman.

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What brought Nixon and Kissinger together on Vietnam was that they came to see that the struggle in Southeast Asia was not about preventing falling dominoes; it was about actual Chinese aggression. Following the communist takeover of the mainland in 1949, such aggression was seen in Korea, Taiwan, southwestern China (Xizang, or Tibet), and along contested borders with India. American leaders believed the revolutionary Chinese state sought to spread revolution elsewhere. This is not the same thing as the domino theory. At a time when he was in regular contact with both Nixon and Kissinger, Henry Cabot Lodge Jr. wrote that "U.S. policy in Viet-Nam is truly the spearhead of a very big aim: to deny the great age of East Asia to the imperialism of Communist China."[4] The American sacrifice in Vietnam could be categorized as a success if the Chinese were stopped and a broader Sino-U.S. war were avoided. Vietnam was therefore deeply linked to other matters.

The book's overly siloed focus on Kissinger and Vietnam forces the reader to ignore blind spots that are too large to ignore. One cannot examine a complicated policy like Kissinger's role in ending the Vietnam War without examining domestic policy, other foreign policies, American politics, the backgrounds of Nixon and Kissinger and the forces that brought them together, and figures such as Johnson, Lodge, Averell Harriman, and others. The events documented in the book did not occur during the *Kissinger* administration; they occurred during the *Nixon* administration. Kissinger did not have nearly the freedom of action that Brigham assumes he did. I asked Kissinger during a recent meeting how historians should characterize his role in these events, decades from now, when I am as old as he is. The ninety-five-year-old responded with none of the "lone cowboy" bravado emphasized by Brigham: "I played a central role in a number of creative initiatives, but Nixon was the president," he said.[5]

There are other issues that are more complicated and require more nuanced presentation. For example, the tapes reveal that Nixon's primary concern regarding the Easter Offensive in 1972 was not losing votes from moderates and swing voters, as Brigham says (170), but appearing tough in the weeks prior to the upcoming Soviet summit. John Connally was the only member of Nixon's cabinet to recommend the tough response that Nixon used, and he was also someone Nixon saw as his natural successor. There is some evidence, too, that Nixon's "election-year bombshell" (165) disclosure in his January 25, 1972 speech—that Kissinger had been sent to Paris beginning in August 1969 as his personal representative to begin secret negotiations—had something to do with the Moorer-Radford affair of late 1971. Nixon feared that the Radford documents had been leaked to Jack Anderson, and he dreaded the possibility that the American people might learn about Kissinger's secret mission for the first time in a newspaper column. Disclosing Kissinger's role was a way to get out in front of the scandal. The Moorer-Radford Affair is not mentioned in the book.

Finally, to say that efforts by the *Washington Post* to "continue to unravel" Watergate "eventually led Nixon to resign the presidency in August" (189) requires one to buy in fully to the Hollywoodized version of *All the President's Men*—a version that caused even Ben Bradlee to say "there's a residual fear in my soul that that isn't quite right."[6] Watergate was unraveled by various investigations, including those of the Ervin Committee, the U.S. Attorney for the District of Columbia, the Watergate Special Prosecution Force, and the House Judiciary Committee. The reporters who have largely been given credit by the public and scholars were dependent on leaks, sometimes illegal, from these investigations for their continued reporting.

The book is also not quite what it claims to be as it pertains to research. Part of the problem is that so many key records remain closed: hundreds of hours of presidential tapes, NSA wiretaps of the Paris peace talks, Nixon's pre- and post-presidential records, Kissinger's complete personal papers, and CIA wiretaps on South Vietnamese

officials, to name just a few examples. No author can be held completely accountable for a publisher's marketing claim that a book is based on extensive research at the Nixon Library, on Kissinger's personal papers, and on materials from the archives in Vietnam. But while widely researched, the mining at individual archives is quite shallow. The volume cites just enough archives, just enough collections, and just enough of each collection to appear as though it were thorough. There is no original work using the Nixon tapes, which would have been a goldmine for a book like this. Among the sources the author lists that are now available to scholars, Brigham does not even mention the Nixon tapes, or the fact that more than five hundred hours remain restricted (xii). If the author wanted to get full value from the tapes, he could have compared precisely what Kissinger said to Nixon with what Kissinger then said to others in order to bolster his argument that Kissinger betrayed the president.[7]

In addition, the papers of Henry Cabot Lodge, Jr. are cited, but the most valuable portions, as they pertain to Kissinger's early years and the Vietnam negotiations, are not cited.[8] These are critically important, not just because Lodge spent more time working on the subject of Vietnam in more capacities than any other contemporary and because his relationship with Nixon went back to the early 1950s, but because Lodge's role in elevating Henry Kissinger has been overlooked. "You started the sequence that led to this appointment by inviting me to Saigon. I shall not forget this," Kissinger wrote to Lodge on December 10, 1968, after being named Nixon's national security adviser.[9] The research at the National Archives Center 2 in Ho Chi Minh City looks especially thin. Two endnotes cite two documents, and one of those is a collection of public government statements.[10]

By using foreign documentation, Brigham has admittedly gone further than many American diplomatic historians. He deserves credit for that. However, it is fair to ask whether he has interpreted this foreign documentation properly. Similar questions could be asked about his earlier works, *Guerilla Diplomacy* and *ARVN*.[11] Citations to foreign works are time consuming and more difficult to inspect. For example, Brigham makes a significant claim that after Kissinger met with Xuan Thuy on August 4, 1969, at Jean Sainteny's apartment in Paris, he told the North Vietnamese that Nixon was prepared to open a secret communications channel and would create the most favorable circumstances to arrive at a solution (64–65). The claim is central to Brigham's broader argument that Kissinger was reckless, acted without authority and betrayed Nixon. However, the book cited, by Bai Ban Bo, covers only secret contacts with Kissinger during the Johnson administration and does not discuss such contact in 1969. The citation to the book is also more wrong than right. It was indeed published in 1985, but not by Nha Xuat Ban Su That in Hanoi as claimed, but by Ho Chi Minh City Publishing House in the former Saigon.[12]

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Another occasion in which Brigham uses a difficult-to-verify foreign source to bolster his broader arguments is endnote fifty-eight in chapter 2. He writes that "Le Duan had disapproved of negotiations in general ever since the 1954 debacle at Geneva, which had divided Vietnam at the seventeenth parallel following its war with France. He was a southerner who believed that the party had surrendered at the negotiating table what it had rightfully won on the battlefield, leaving the South an occupied land in the hands of the American allies in Saigon." The citation is not to a page but to an entire book, *Le Duan, Thu vao Nam [Letters to the South]* (Hanoi: Nha Xuat Ban Quan Doi Nhan Dan, 2005). The missing page number citation makes it difficult to check another critical part of Brigham's argument. There is no evidence that an updated 2005 edition of this book exists, or, if it does, that it was published by the People's Army Publishing House instead of the more appropriate National Political Publishing House [Nha Xuan Ban Chinh Tri Quoc Gia]. This reviewer is fairly confident that Le Duan said no such thing in his letters as they were published in the original 1965 version.

A final occasion where this pattern recurs is in chapter 3. Regarding Kissinger's secret meeting on February 21, 1970, with Le Duc Tho, Brigham writes, "Although he made no mention of it to Kissinger, Tho told his associates in Hanoi that he thought Washington would eventually be forced to concede on the troop withdrawal to end the American war" (96–97). Again, it is a key point in support of the view that Kissinger exceeded his authority during negotiations in which he was outmatched. However, the book cited simply provides a report on Kissinger's presentation during their meeting, and Tho says nothing about the United States being "eventually forced to concede on the mutual troop withdrawal."[13]

The book is not all bad, however. Since it is the first in a new genre, the critics will naturally be harsh on it—this one included. But Brigham is impressively balanced on some topics where his predecessors were not. His best material is in chapter 6, "Peace is at Hand." In fact, following the attention-getting introduction, the rest of the book as a whole is surprisingly balanced.

For example, some scholars have had an almost single-minded obsession with the "decent interval" theory to explain Nixon and Kissinger's overarching Vietnam theory. Brigham is more nuanced (150–51). It is absurd to believe that strict adherence to a single philosophical concept explained all actions taken by Nixon and Kissinger with respect to Vietnam. The tapes reveal that on some days they felt the war was going well and on others they were pessimistic. Their moods, words, and actions revolved around many things outside of their direct control: the weather in Vietnam, weekly casualty figures, and domestic political opinion. There are even times when adherents of the decent interval theory are too generous. On some days Nixon and Kissinger spoke about desiring no interval at all other than the time necessary to withdraw POWs and get out. Finally, Brigham does not blame Nixon and Kissinger for the overthrow of Sihanouk (111). North Vietnam had a longer history of destabilizing Cambodia than the Americans did, although this is overlooked by many scholars.

The Vietnamese have a phrase—***đầu voi, đuôi chuột***. It means *the head of an elephant and the tail of a mouse*, which can be translated as "making a mountain out of a molehill." Robert Brigham has performed an admirable service by offering a critique of Henry Kissinger's Vietnam diplomacy. With the appropriate passage of time, Kissinger deserves a dispassionate critique commensurate with the role he played in these historic events. That is not this book. It will take a bigger book to mine the tapes, personal papers, and newly declassified documents in the United States and numerous foreign countries. Kissinger is only ninety-five. Perhaps it is still too soon.

Notes:

1. See Niall Ferguson, *Kissinger,* vol. 1, *1923–1968: The Idealist* (New York, 2015). Ferguson started a conversation that will only be amplified once the second volume of his biography is published. He deserves a response, but it should be as well researched as his conversation starters. This reviewer, for one, is hesitant to describe Kissinger as an idealist in the 1960s. He was hardworking, ideologically malleable, ambitious, and sufficiently successful with the mainstream of both major political parties that he was an obvious choice for a political appointment no matter who won

in 1968. But that does not make him an idealist.
2. Currently the best book on this subject, including the bombing halt, the 1968 election, and the relationship between President Lyndon Johnson and Vice President Hubert Humphrey, is Arnold Offner's *Hubert Humphrey: The Conscience of the Country* (New Haven, CT, 2018). However, most scholars continue to cite the more sensational accounts written by non-scholars.
3. See Richard A. Moss, *Nixon's Back Channel to Moscow: Confidential Diplomacy and Détente* (Lexington, KS, 2017); Jeffrey Kimball and William Burr, *Nixon Nuclear Specter: The Secret Alert of 1969, Madman Diplomacy, and the Vietnam War* (Lawrence, KS, 2015); Niall Ferguson, *Kissinger*; and Irwin Gellman, *The Contender: Richard Nixon, The Congress Years, 1946–1952* (New York, 1999) and *The President and the Apprentice: Eisenhower and Nixon, 1952–1961* (New Haven, CT, 2016).
4. "United States Policy in Vietnam," Undated, Reel 23, Microfilm Edition, Henry Cabot Lodge, Jr. Papers II, Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston, MA (hereafter MHS).
5. Meeting with Henry Kissinger, New York, NY, June 27, 2018, 3:30–4:30 p.m.
6. See Jeff Himmelman, *Yours in Truth: A Personal Portrait of Ben Bradlee* (New York, 2012), 214.
7. Brigham extensively cites my work, published with Douglas Brinkley, *The Nixon Tapes: 1971–1972* (Boston, 2014). While the work offers by far the most Nixon tape transcripts in one volume, many having to do with Vietnam were cut during production due to space limitations. In addition, there are many that have not been transcribed. It would have been especially fruitful to listen to and transcribe portions from the time Kissinger left for another negotiating session, or just after he returned.
8. Recently I reviewed all of Henry Cabot Lodge, Jr.'s personal papers at the Massachusetts Historical Society for my upcoming biography of him, to be published by Yale University Press. If not for this deep dive over the past four years, I could not have written this review with the same level of detail. The best parts of Lodge's papers as they pertain to Brigham's book include Reels 9–10, 13–14, and 22–23, Microfilm Edition, Henry Cabot Lodge, Jr. Papers II, which provide important background on the Nixon-era Vietnam negotiations, the relationship between Lodge and Kissinger and Nixon, and what the Nixon administration learned from the LBJ negotiations. In addition, Reel 12 covers Lodge-Nixon conversations during the transition and early part of the new administration, Vietnam negotiations, and Lodge's role leading the talks in Paris. Lodge also wrote countless memoranda for the file, which, taken together, are at times as thorough as a diary. His "Lessons of Vietnam" in Reel 20, written in 1973, is one that is particularly relevant to Brigham's book. Another is "United States Policy in Vietnam" in Reel 23.
9. Letter from Henry Kissinger to Henry Cabot Lodge Jr., December 10, 1968, Reel 9, Microfilm Edition, Henry Cabot Lodge, Jr. Papers II, MHS.
10. In Brigham's acknowledgments, he writes that "Tung Vu conducted research in the Vietnamese archives in Ho Chi Minh City." The computerized finding aids in the research room at the Trung Tam Luu Tru Quoc Gia II [National Archives Center II] are not as intuitive as, say, a Google search. The folder level index includes typographical errors, and unless searches are made with all spelling variations, including the errors, one might not locate all relevant material. For example, there are an especially large number of variations of the spelling of Robert McNamara's last name. Although there are many more documents in existence, the only two documents that Brigham cites, in endnotes 6 and 9 of chapter one (p. 248), are Tuyen bo, Thong cao, Thong diem cua Chinh phi VNCH ve cac bien pap hgung ban nam 1968, November 1, 1968 [Statement of the Government of the Republic of Vietnam on November 1968, Declarations, Announcements, and Messages of the Government of the Republic of Vietnam on Ceasefires of 1968]; and Ve tinh hinh chinh tri va chinh sach ngoai giao cua Hoa Ky, 1968–1975 [On the Political Atmosphere and Foreign Policy of the United States, 1968–1975].
11. See Robert Brigham, *Guerilla Diplomacy: The NLF's Foreign Relations and the Vietnam War* (Ithaca, NY, 1998) and *ARVN: Life and Death in the South Vietnamese Army* (Lawrence, KS, 2006).
12. See Mai Ban No, *Tan cong ngoia* [*sic*] *giao [Diplomatic Offensive and Secret Contacts]* (Hanoi: Nha Xuat Ban Su That, 1985), 165–68. Brigham, on pp. 64–65, offers a citation to this book for the following: "the President of the United States is prepared to open another, secret channel with Vietnam to appoint a high-ranking representative of competence to have productive discussions. . . . If this channel is opened, the United States will adjust its military activities to create the most favorable circumstances to arrive at a solution." However, there is nothing in Mai Van Bo's book on Kissinger's secret talks in 1969.
13. The following is a translation of pgs. 249–50 of *Bo Ngoai Giao [Ministry of Foreign Affairs], Dai su ky chuyen de: Dau Tranh Ngoai Giao va von dong quoc te trong nhung chien cong My, cuu nuoc [Special Chronology: The Diplomatic Struggle and International Activities of the Anti-American Resistance and National Salvation]* (Hanoi: Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1987):

> From Le Duc Tho and Xuan Thuy to the Politburo:
> Content of the private meeting between Xuan Thuy and Kissinger.
> -Military: The U.S. is prepared to discuss the total withdrawal of all U.S. forces, including the troops of allied armies and the total dismantling of U.S. military bases that did not exist before the Americans arrived. The U.S. will withdraw their troops in phases and complete the withdrawal within 16 months of the signing of an agreement. The time schedule for the withdrawal will be based on the number of troops currently in South Vietnam, which as of April 15, 1970, was 422,000 men.
> -Inspection of the withdrawal: Kissinger wants to make this a part of any agreement in order to ensure that the two sides withdraw their forces and implement the agreement.
> -Prisoners of war held by the two sides will be released during the first phase of the troop withdrawal (during the first five months).
> -Kissinger brought up the withdrawal of all non-South Vietnamese forces and presented an order for the withdrawal of these forces:
> -25% to be withdrawn after six months;
> -50% to be withdrawn after eight months;
> -75% to be withdrawn after twelve months;
> -All to be totally withdrawn after sixteen months.
> In general, Kissinger only talked about military issues and said nothing about a political settlement.
> Our side:
> -Criticized the U.S. for trying to separate military matters from the political problem.
> -Criticized the U.S. for expanding the war into Laos and Cambodia.
> (Incoming Cable, Volume 182, Archives Office, Foreign Ministry)

Tho reports absolutely nothing from his conversation with Kissinger in which the latter said that the U.S. would be "eventually forced to concede on the mutual troop withdrawal."

Review of Robert K. Brigham, *Reckless: Henry Kissinger and the Tragedy of Vietnam*

David F. Schmitz

In the days leading up to D-Day, June 6, 1944, President Franklin D. Roosevelt prepared two announcements. The first, which told the American people about the successful operation and the establishment of a beachhead in Normandy, France, was the one actually released. The second was prepared in case the cross-channel attack met disaster. Roosevelt was prepared to take full responsibility and blame for the failure.

The contrast between FDR's approach to D-Day and the approach of President Richard Nixon and his National Security Advisor Henry A. Kissinger to events in Vietnam could not be greater. In one of the striking examples from Robert K. Brigham's superb study of Kissinger's management of the war in Vietnam, Brigham points out that the finger-pointing and blaming of others for the failure of the incursion into Laos in 1971, Operation Lam Son 719, began even before the operation started and was typical behavior for Kissinger, who refused to take responsibility for any mistakes, failures, and shortcomings during his time in office. This is just one of the many insights and key themes Brigham explores in his seminal study of

Kissinger's role in the Nixon administration's negotiations with Hanoi from 1969 to the signing of the Paris Peace Accords in January 1973.

Kissinger entered office believing the only way to end the war was through a negotiated agreement. From his perspective there were, as Brigham notes, "simply too many explicit constraints on US power to make a military victory likely" (ix). At the outset, Kissinger believed he could achieve a settlement that was based on a mutual withdrawal of North Vietnamese and U.S. troops (as well as the removal of Hanoi's forces from Cambodia and Laos), the recognition of the DMZ as an international boundary, a release of all POWs, and the preservation of the Saigon government intact and in full control in South Vietnam. Kissinger's goal, Brigham writes, was "to negotiate a final peace agreement in Paris that traded an American exit from Vietnam for political guarantees for Saigon" (x). As the author unequivocally states: the national security advisor's effort "was a total failure. Kissinger failed in each of his stated goals to achieve 'peace with honor'" (xi).

Brigham's work, as he notes, is the first comprehensive study of "Kissinger's strategic and diplomatic failures on the final peace agreement." It sets out to show that "Kissinger's misplaced faith in his own abilities to secure an honorable peace prolonged the war unnecessarily and sealed South Vietnam's fate" (xii). In this *Reckless* brilliantly succeeds.

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However, Brigham also does much more. He shows how the national security advisor "made a bad situation worse … with his reckless assumptions about the use of force and diplomacy" (xii). In addition to explicating how Kissinger's failures stemmed from his shortcomings as a negotiator and how his tactics deepened the tragedy of Vietnam, Robert Brigham challenges and corrects many of Kissinger's and his defenders' distortions, setting the record straight on a number of important points. He directly rejects Niall Ferguson's recent portrayal of Kissinger as an idealist, stating he was "a classical realist who ironically acted with great emotion and personalized much of his effort to secure America's place in the international system. As a lone actor, an instrument of free will, he was determined to shape history" (45).

Brigham also rejects the theory that Kissinger sought a decent interval for withdrawal. Rather, the national security advisor held "to the idea that he could coordinate punishing military strikes against North Vietnam with diplomacy in Paris" to achieve his goal, which by 1972 was not saving South Vietnam but was "getting Nixon reelected" (150-151). Brigham further demonstrates that Kissinger developed his policies toward Vietnam and negotiated in Paris from a series of false assumptions and premises about the war and Hanoi's goals. In the end, of course, Kissinger's efforts only resolved the role of the United States in the war in Vietnam as he willingly sacrificed the needs of Saigon to conclude a deal.

Henry Kissinger has worked hard to shape a favorable portrayal of his role in Vietnam through his writings and public appearances, and despite the obvious failure of the Paris Peace Agreement, he continues to be seen by many in power and in the public as a wise senior statesman. Brigham consistently challenges Kissinger's version of events wherever the historical record clearly demonstrates that the former national security advisor has dissembled to further his own image. Space will not allow for a discussion of all the cases, but Brigham demonstrates, for example, that Kissinger did support the Cambodian invasion even though he has worked hard to keep his role secret and create a different impression, and that his recounting of his negotiations with Le Duc Tho is either incomplete or deliberately distorted.

From 1969 to 1973, and subsequently, Kissinger had to keep changing his positions and explanations because he held to incorrect assumptions about the Vietnam War. This behavior started with an early articulation of the madman theory, which Kissinger expressed during his first weeks in office. He wanted to make the North Vietnamese think that Nixon was utterly obsessed with beating communism; and he was convinced, Brigham shows, that North Vietnam "would be forced to negotiate a mutual withdrawal from South Vietnam" despite having "no evidence to support these claims" (24). "I can't believe that a fourth-rate power like North Vietnam doesn't have a breaking point," he said. All the United States had to do, he told Nixon, was "hit them" and "Hanoi would beg 'for private talks'" (x).

Kissinger would also encourage Nixon "to think that acts of toughness—such as bombing Cambodia—could substitute for tactical and strategic disadvantage in Vietnam" (41). Therefore, he negotiated by issuing ultimatums and threats, which the North Vietnamese dismissed or ignored. Another constant that Kissinger held to in the face of clear evidence to the contrary, including Soviet denials, was that Moscow could force Hanoi to make concessions favorable to Washington.

Brigham argues that Kissinger's style of negotiating ran contrary both to negotiating theory and to successful examples of negotiations from history. Instead of building "a negotiations constituency," he isolated himself and cut out the rest of the national security bureaucracy along with Congress and Saigon. In place of "first negotiating principles," Kissinger "conditioned each meeting in Paris with military escalation, or at least the threat of escalation," an approach that has never yielded success (66-68).

This strategy led to a lack of "buy-in" for the talks among allies and to long periods of inactivity. Kissinger remained focus on the stick of military power and failed to make negotiations a sufficiently attractive carrot for Hanoi. "His coercive strategy in Paris lacked vision, shutting out potential allies. Altering this approach would have taken away from his privileged position, but it might have led to more expansive and coordinated negotiations to end the war" (66-68).

Finally, from the outset, the national security advisor cut Saigon out of the negotiations of the war to enhance his control over the process and to keep South Vietnam in the dark about the concessions he was making over time in his effort to secure a peace deal prior to the 1972 presidential election. As Brigham notes, when Kissinger ultimately realized he could not achieve a mutual troop withdrawal and switched to the position of seeking a standstill cease-fire to enable the United States to devise a process for the final removal of U.S. forces, he did so without informing, much less consulting, Saigon. When the Thieu government learned the details about the agreement, it balked. Nixon briefly backed Saigon, but in the end joined with Kissinger to force Saigon to accept the Paris agreement that sealed its fate.

I have a couple of concerns that arise from solely focusing on Kissinger and seeking to correct many of the national security advisor's distortions and lies both when he uttered them and when he wrote about events later. The chronology gets confusing at a few points as the time frame shifts so Brigham can follow through on a theme. This, however, is a small price to pay for the value of Brigham's judicious analysis and weighing of the evidence against Kissinger's claims.

A more substantive concern involves the explanation of how the Nixon administration would escalate in 1969 at the same time it announced it was pursuing Vietnamization and beginning the troop withdrawals that would consistently undercut Kissinger's and Nixon's threats. Brigham writes that after a National Security Council meeting on January 25, 1969, "no one present … could have predicted that the administration would pursue military escalation and troop withdrawals simultaneously" (27). By examining only Kissinger's position, Brigham misses the fact that when Nixon came to office, he still believed the United States could win the war militarily, and he held to that position until the failure in Cambodia in April and May 1970. Meanwhile, Kissinger saw escalation and bombing as a threat in negotiations.

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To try and win the war by force, the president had to buy political time for his madman policy to work. He therefore set out to create the impression that he was starting to wind the war down through Vietnamization while he was actually escalating it through the secret bombing campaign and planning for Operation Duck Hook and the invasion of Cambodia. The national security advisor opposed the troop withdrawals, in part, because they were associated with and supported by Secretary of Defense Melvin Laird and, as Brigham clearly demonstrates, Kissinger wanted to keep Laird away from decision making on Vietnam.

Kissinger also opposed Vietnamization because he knew the impact it would have on his ability to threaten the North Vietnamese. Thus, he and Nixon were not always on the same page, a situation that led the national security advisor to consistently misrepresent the content of his talks with the North Vietnamese in Paris. As Brigham explains, Kissinger wanted to keep his secret talks alive and "concluded therefore that truthful reporting of these meetings threatened that goal because the president was not fully committed to a negotiated settlement" (108). Like so many of Nixon's and Kissinger's policies toward Vietnam, Vietnamization conflicted with other policies, and it ultimately failed.

In his conclusion, Brigham pulls no punches. "Despite his considerable intellect and talent," Brigham states, "Kissinger was never able to secure a peace agreement that settled the major question of the war: the political future of South Vietnam" (243). North Vietnamese forces remained in South Vietnam as the United States left, leaving Saigon to fight on its own. The United States originally escalated its commitment in 1965 because South Vietnam could not succeed on its own despite ten years of American aid and military support. The subsequent eight years of fighting had not changed that reality.

Nixon and Kissinger could have achieved similar result from the Paris Peace Agreement in 1969 without four more years of fighting. Brigham thus concludes that "the war in Vietnam was an American disaster" made even worse by the escalations and by the duplicity of the Nixon administration. Nonetheless, Kissinger, "despite his failures in Vietnam, has emerged as a symbol of American shrewdness in exercising power." *Reckless* fully demonstrates how wrong that view is and how Kissinger "recklessly sought ends beyond his mean" (244).

Author's Response

Robert K. Brigham

I want to thank the four reviewers of *Reckless* for their time, energy, and comments. SHAFR members are known for taking ideas seriously, and I was pleased to see that these reviewers lived up to that reputation. I was especially heartened that all four found *Reckless* highly readable and a valuable contribution to the discussion on the Vietnam War. All four reviewers also wished that I had expanded my portrait of Kissinger to include other aspects of his foreign policy agenda that might shed light on the Vietnam negotiations. This is a fair critique. Deciding what to include and what to leave out of a trade press book written for a general reading audience—and with a strict word limit—is always difficult.

Scott Laderman clearly understands and agrees with the main themes of the book. He was particularly drawn to the idea that Kissinger never fully appreciated American political realities, "including the need to demonstrate to a frustrated Congress and public that the war was not without end." Kissinger was much more interested in domestic politics than any of his writings on the Vietnam War indicate. More work needs to be done to highlight the strained relationship between Kissinger, the public, and Congress. Laderman also found intriguing the issue of South Vietnam's legitimacy, and I must confess that this remains a topic that fascinates me. Much of the new writing on Vietnam from those with significant language skills focuses on the "idea" of South Vietnam.[1] This is also a subtext in some of the writings by Viet Thanh Nguyen, Thi Bui, Andrew Lam, and Andrew Pham, among others.

Any author appreciates it when a reviewer focuses almost exclusively on the main themes of the book, and this is certainly true of David Schmitz's review. He suggests that *Reckless* is, at its heart, a book about Kissinger and the secret negotiations in Paris. He understands my criticisms of Kissinger as a negotiator. He also agrees that Kissinger's efforts "only confirmed suspicions about the part the United States had played in the war in Vietnam, as he willingly sacrificed the needs of Saigon to conclude a deal." For example, the final peace agreement did not include a mutual troop withdrawal from South Vietnam. By agreement, ten PAVN main force infantry divisions were allowed to stay in South Vietnam. There were no enforcement mechanisms built into the peace agreement. There was no legitimate oversight for a political process in South Vietnam after an American withdrawal. Schmitz also supports my view that Kissinger thought that toughness could help replace any political, tactical, or strategic disadvantages the United States may have faced in Vietnam. Being tough did not always work out the way Kissinger intended.

Luke Nichter and I disagree on the degree to which Kissinger's ego and ambition (and emotions) influenced his negotiating strategy in Vietnam. I thank Nichter for finding a few Vietnamese citations that were mangled by my dyslexia software. On the meeting with Jean Sainteny on August 4, 1969, the quote is entirely accurate. Its source is Luu Van Loi and Nguyen Anh Vu, *Cac cuoc thuong luong Le Duc Tho-Kissinger tai Paris* (91–92). The English translation of the same book, *Le Duc Tho-Kissinger Negotiations in Paris*, carries that same passage on page 100.[2]

Le Duan's well-known opposition to negotiations and his emphasis on the need to build up revolutionary forces are major themes of his "Letters to the South," properly cited as Le Duan, *Thu Vao Nam* (Hanoi: Nha Xuat Ban Su

That, 1965). For a good description of Le Duan's attitude toward negotiations, see Lien-Hang Nguyen's *Hanoi's War*. She writes that "Le Duan, who had already marginalized Ho Chi Minh in the Party leadership by invoking his failed negotiation attempts with the French, remained apprehensive of a diplomatic solution and moved to block the powerful 'peace' proponents. In other words, he drew a significant lesson from the First Indochina War: diplomacy without military superiority should be avoided at all costs."[3] I appreciate Nichter's suggestions for further research on Lodge and the political turmoil of 1968.

Richard Moss has some questions about Lam Son 719. He rightfully criticizes my use of a conversation between Westmoreland and Kissinger in April 1971 to show the general's opposition to the Laos invasion by ARVN troops that began in February 1971. I should have used an earlier source—one from December 11, 1970—that clearly shows that Westmoreland had been critical of Abrams's plans for a frontal assault on Laos using ARVN troops all along.[4] For intelligence reports available to Kissinger showing increased PAVN strength in Laos, see Richard Hunt's *Melvin Laird and the Foundation of the Post-Vietnam Military, 1969–1973*. James Willbanks discusses ongoing intelligence assessments on the PAVN in *A Raid Too Far: Operation Lam Son 719 and Vietnamization in Laos*.[5]

Moss disagrees with my conclusion that Nixon was keeping Kissinger at arm's length in late December 1971 and early January 1972, following the Radford affair and the Jack Anderson piece in the *Washington Post*. One source for my thinking is Kissinger. On December 30, 1971, Kissinger confides to Haldeman that the "president has lost confidence in him." He feels that Nixon has been handling him the way he handled Rogers, "and this worries him." During that same conversation, Kissinger even threatened to resign his NSA position.[6] Kissinger also told a friend that he feared he "was out of favor" with the president.[7]

Historian Robert Dallek agrees. "Nixon limited Henry's access to him," he writes. "Regular morning meetings with the president were canceled and Nixon would not take Henry's phone calls."[8] Moss also claims that the footnote associated with my assessment of Nixon's cool treatment of Kissinger "does not support the claim that Nixon was holding Kissinger at arm's length at that time." But there is no such footnote. That sentence, on page 164 of *Reckless*, does not have a footnote. I use other sources earlier in the text to reach that determination. The footnote Moss refers to comes two footnotes and two paragraphs later, on page 165 (fn. 14). It shows that Nixon eventually brought Kissinger in from the cold on January 12 to help with his Vietnam speeches of January 1972. The footnote is clearly about their conversation of January 12, not the events that proceeded it.

Moss does ask one very important question. Since Kissinger was "boxed in by the realities on the ground and by Nixon's desire to Vietnamize the war, what were the alternatives to using force?" I answer that question throughout *Reckless*, as I explore paths not taken by Kissinger and opportunities missed in Washington, Paris, and Saigon.

Notes:

1. See the work of Sean Fear, Ed Miller, and Nu-Anh Tran.
2. Luu Van Loi and Nguyen Anh Vu, *Cac cuoc thuong luong Le Duc Tho-Kissinger tai Paris* (Hanoi: Nha Xuat Ban Cong an Nhan Dan, 1996), 91–92; *Le Duc Tho-Kissinger Negotiations in Paris* (Hanoi: Gioi Publishers, 1996).
3. Lien-Hang Nguyen, *Hanoi's War* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2012), 78.
4. For a good discussion of Westmoreland's opposition to Abrams's plan, see Richard A. Hunt, *Melvin Laird and the Foundation of the Post-Vietnam Military, 1969–1973* (Washington DC, 2015), 176–77. Footnote 37 on page 177 gives a host of sources on this conversation and on Moorer's decision on December 18 to reject Westmoreland's suggestions for a quick air mobile attack on Laos and instead to follow the Abrams plan.
5. Hunt, *Melvin Laird*, 175, 179; James Willbanks, *A Raid Too Far: Operation Lam Son 719 and Vietnamization in Laos* (College Station, TX, 2014), 115.
6. H.R. Haldeman, *The Haldeman Diaries: Inside the Nixon White House* (New York, 1994), 388.
7. As quoted in Robert Dallek, *Nixon and Kissinger: Partners in Power* (New York, 2007), 351.
8. Dallek, *Nixon and Kissinger*, 351.