

Introduction

The Case for Henry Kissinger and Latin America

Kissinger and Latin America: Intervention, Human Rights, and Diplomacy provides an opportunity for interpreting U.S. policies toward Latin America during a critical period of the Cold War. Except for the issue of Chile under Salvador Allende, historians have largely ignored inter-American relations during the presidencies of Richard M. Nixon and Gerald R. Ford. The book also offers a way of adding to and challenging the prevailing historiography on one of the most preeminent policymakers in the history of U.S. foreign relations. Scholarly studies on Henry Kissinger and his policies between 1969 and 1977 have tended to survey his approach to the world, with an emphasis on initiatives toward the Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China and the struggle to extricate the United States from the conflict in Southeast Asia. Other scholars have focused on Kissinger's role in bilateral relations with countries such as Pakistan and Iran. This book offers something new: analyzing U.S. policies toward a distinct region of the world during Kissinger's career as national security adviser and secretary of state.

The Ambitious Kissinger

Students and scholars might ask, Why open a book about Henry A. Kissinger and Latin America? That question might be asked because the prevailing assumption has been that Kissinger and the Richard M. Nixon and Gerald R. Ford administrations had no interest in the region and left relations with Latin America to career diplomats. The only significant issue was the U.S. opposition to the election of Salvador Allende (1970–1973) to the presidency of Chile,

because of Allende's alleged ties to the international communist movement. This study challenges the notion that Henry Kissinger dismissed relations with the southern neighbors. The energetic Kissinger devoted more time and effort to Latin America than any of his predecessors or successors who served as national security adviser or secretary of state during the Cold War era (1945–1989). He waged war against Salvador Allende and successfully destabilized a government in Bolivia. He resolved nettlesome issues with Mexico, Peru, Ecuador, and Venezuela. He launched critical initiatives with Panama and Cuba. Kissinger also bolstered and coddled murderous military dictators who trampled on basic human rights. South American military dictators committed international terrorism in Europe and the Western Hemisphere.

In their memoirs, Presidents Nixon and Ford and Kissinger himself did their best to leave the impression that Republican administrations dismissed relations with Latin America. In *RN*, Nixon wrote a monumental memoir of over a thousand pages. The only substantial discussion of inter-American relations revolved around Vice President Nixon's tour of South America in the spring of 1958. Nixon faced violent protests over the Dwight D. Eisenhower administration's support for authoritarian rulers in the region and was almost killed by a howling mob in Caracas, Venezuela. The point Nixon wanted to make was that he remained calm and brave in the face of danger. On Allende and Chile, Nixon penned one innocuous page in which he conceded that the United States financed anti-Allende groups but only in response to communist Cuba's financial backing of Allende. He observed that the Chilean military overthrew Allende because of his inefficiency. Nixon had a few pages on the alleged plan by the Soviet Union to build a base for submarines in Cuba. But this incident was included to prove that his diplomacy was superior to President John F. Kennedy's rash approach to the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962. President Ford largely ignored Latin America in his autobiography.¹

Compared to their foreign-policy partner, Nixon and Ford proved concise writers. Henry Kissinger produced a three-volume memoir over two decades that amounted to over 3,800 pages in length. In all three volumes, Kissinger offered lengthy, legalistic defenses of his role in the overthrow of Allende and the subsequent embrace of the brutal Chilean dictator General Augusto Pinochet (1973–1990). Kissinger's defense could be summarized as, "I was not deeply engaged in Chilean matters." In any case, Kissinger reiterated Nixon's argument that Allende fell because of his own incompetence.² The problem

for Kissinger was that the last volume of his memoirs was published in 1999, as President Bill Clinton was ordering files on covert U.S. activities in Chile to be opened and before the declassification of the transcripts of Kissinger's telephone conversations on Chile with President Nixon. Both men took credit for Allende's overthrow in an astonishing conversation that mixed talk of the Washington Redskins football team with a celebration of the demise of Chilean constitutionalism and democracy.³

Beyond Chile, Kissinger had nothing to say of significance about Latin America until his last volume, when he devoted eighty-five pages of text to the region. His approach was selective. He skipped his role in orchestrating the overthrow of the Bolivian government of Juan José Torres in 1971 and the implicit approval he offered in 1976 to the Argentine military's plan to carry out wholesale murder against political leftists. He thought, however, that by "Latin American standards," Brazil's military rulers were "remarkably benign." He made the factually incorrect statement that in Brazil "the opposition went into exile, rather than to prison or death."⁴ Kissinger had received in April 1974 a top-secret report from the director of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) that revealed that Brazilian presidents authorized the summary execution of political prisoners.⁵ On the other hand, Kissinger did not take credit in his memoirs for his successful negotiations with Mexico, Peru, and Ecuador over challenging treaty, trade, and investment issues, and he was modest about his role in negotiating a treaty to transfer sovereignty of the Panama Canal back to Panama. Perhaps the most intriguing assertion in Kissinger's memoirs was his self-discovery that he grew fond of Latin Americans and that he received "warmth and affection [he didn't] get anyplace else—including Europe."⁶



A jovial Secretary of State Henry A. Kissinger in Mexico City in 1976. Kissinger enjoyed interacting with Latin Americans and had many Mexican friends. He especially liked to relax in Acapulco. United States Information Services (USIS) photo.

The documentary record sustains the finding that Henry Kissinger directed inter-American relations between 1969 and 1977. Scholars have long noted the irony that the secretive Nixon-Kissinger team was more open to study than previous governments. For three years, President Nixon taped his conversations with administration officials in various settings in the White House. Scholars have had available to them the 3,700 hours of the “White House Tapes.” Kissinger further aided scholars by ordering aides to listen in and transcribe 15,000 of his telephone conversations. His conversations have been placed on the internet and are easily accessible through search engines. In recent years, the Historical Office of the Department of State has released perhaps 10,000 documents on inter-American relations during the Kissinger years in its prestigious *Foreign Relations of the United States (FRUS)* series. The Historical Office also produced separate volumes for 1969 to 1977 on U.S. relations with Chile and negotiations with Panama over the canal. In 2016, the CIA released the “President’s Daily Briefs” (PDBs), some 2,500 documents, for the Nixon-Ford years. These were intelligence briefings on key international developments that the two presidents received on a daily basis. Kissinger claimed in his memoirs that the Nixon administration rarely focused on

Allende's Chile. The PDBs demonstrate that Nixon received approximately 300 briefings on Chile from the CIA. Finally, President Barack Obama emulated Clinton's action on Chilean records, ordering the declassification of U.S. documents related to human rights abuses committed in Argentina during the military dictatorship. In April 2017, President Trump presented documents to Argentine President Mauricio Macri, who was on an official visit to Washington, DC. Vice President Joseph R. Biden Jr. had previously carried documents on U.S. knowledge of torture in Brazil to Brasília and presented them to President Dilma Rousseff.

Compared to the records of previous presidential administrations, the records for the Kissinger years are extraordinary. Kissinger ordered aides, such as Peter Rodman, to prepare verbatim accounts of his conversations with Latin American officials or his unfettered debates at the National Security Council (NSC). State Department and NSC records typically are summaries of discussions and are characterized by dry, bureaucratic language. But Kissinger's memorandums of conversations contain frank, even raw language and indicate when Kissinger raised his voice in anger. His endless jokes and jests, some of which are hilarious and others of which are grubby and mean, are also recorded. More important, the records demonstrate that Kissinger dominated the making of policy with Latin America, especially after he became secretary of state and after Gerald Ford became president. His legendary work ethic is on display in these records. He often spent two hours with individual Latin American foreign ministers in discussions on bilateral issues. By comparison, his notable predecessors—Dean Acheson, John Foster Dulles, Dean Rusk—assigned their assistant secretaries the duty of consulting with Latin American officials. He traveled to Latin America more often than his predecessors, and he sat through sessions of inter-American conclaves such as those in Mexico City (1974) and Santiago (1976). Secretary of State Dulles insulted Latin Americans by immediately leaving an inter-American conference in Caracas (1954) after he had obtained an anticommunist resolution aimed at Guatemala and President Jacobo Arbenz Guzmán (1950–1954). Kissinger remarkably stayed overnight at the residences of Latin American leaders. After his February 1976 visit at the country home of Alfonso López Michelsen (1974–1978), the erudite president of Colombia, Kissinger reported that he had “long philosophical talks” in the evening and

morning. He continued: "I confess I rather like it this way, particularly when the talks are with someone as acute as President López."⁷

Like his predecessors, Kissinger judged relations with Western Europe, the Soviet Union, and China as strategically more important than relations with Latin America. And like Dean Rusk, he was consumed by the war in Vietnam. But Kissinger launched noteworthy initiatives, such as the attempt to normalize relations with Cuba and to transfer the canal to Panama. The Kissinger years were also historically significant for Latin Americans. Constitutional rule in South America had been under assault in the 1960s. In January 1969, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Uruguay, and Venezuela retained constitutional systems. But the Brazilian military's overthrow of President João Goulart (1961–1964) had established a dangerous precedent in the region. In 1969, military men ruled in Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Paraguay, and Peru. The right-wing military dictatorships in Brazil and Paraguay were especially repressive. The Argentine military permitted a democratic election in 1973. The newest military dictators were in Peru, where left-wing military officers seized power at the end of 1968. By January 1977, only Colombia and Venezuela had constitutional governments. The 1970s represented the most violent period in the history of post-independence (1825) South America. Argentina's military rulers, who again seized power in March 1976, set a goal of murdering 50,000 citizens. Uruguay, traditionally a placid and stable land, had more political prisoners on a per capita basis than any other nation in the world. Future democratic leaders—Michelle Bachelet of Chile, José Mujica of Uruguay, Dilma Rousseff of Brazil—were subjected to torture and abuse at the hands of military thugs. Central America was also descending into the chaos and violence. Widespread resistance followed Anastasio Somoza Debayle's rigging of an election in 1972 designed to perpetuate the Somoza family dynasty in Nicaragua. The Sandinista movement would feed on this discontent and triumph in 1979. In Guatemala, where political violence had reigned since the CIA's 1954 covert intervention against the Arbenz government, military rulers intensified the horror, sponsoring right-wing death squads that assassinated members of the democratic opposition.

In the case of Guatemala, Kissinger, then the national security adviser, ruled in 1971 that there would be no discussion of curtailing covert assistance to the regime of Carlos Arana Osorio (1970–1974), even though both aides and the CIA had informed Kissinger that President Arana directly participated in

the drawing up of “death lists.”⁸ U.S. complicity in the political violence in Guatemala points to the reality that any discussion of Kissinger and Latin America inevitably raises the “war criminal” allegation that has dogged him for decades. In 2001, while staying at the Ritz Hotel in Paris, he received a summons to appear before Judge Roger Le Loire to answer questions about his knowledge of “Operation Condor,” an international assassination project, and about five French nationals who had disappeared in Chile under General Pinochet. Kissinger ignored the summons and immediately left France. A Chilean court asked Kissinger for help in the cases of two “missing” U.S. citizens, Charles Horman and Frank Teruggi. The two men were the subjects of the award-winning film *Missing* (1982), starring Jack Lemmon and Sissy Spacek and directed by Costa-Gavras. Jurists in Spain, Argentina, and Uruguay also wanted to speak to Kissinger. Kissinger’s lawyers responded to international jurists by noting that the former secretary of state wanted to be helpful but that his memory of events in the 1970s in South America was dim.⁹

Although the aged Kissinger no longer traveled extensively, an appearance by him in the Southern Cone countries of Argentina, Brazil, Chile, and Uruguay in the twenty-first century would unquestionably spark popular demonstrations and demands that the government detain him. The four countries, especially Argentina, have prosecuted war criminals who terrorized their respective populations in the 1970s. In 2010, Argentina sentenced General Jorge Rafael Videla (1976–1981) to life imprisonment for murder and the systematic kidnapping of children. Argentines bitterly recall that Kissinger came to Argentina in 1978 to attend the World Cup soccer tournament. President Videla escorted Kissinger, and Kissinger warmly praised the dictator. During the so-called dirty war (*la guerra sucia*), which started in 1976 and lasted until 1983, the Argentine military murdered 30,000 Argentines. Military officers also “appropriated” 500 children from their murdered parents. Argentine Jews disproportionately suffered at the hands of the military. In 1976, Kissinger was informed by the U.S. embassy in Buenos Aires and his staff that the military was targeting Argentina’s Jewish population, “with anti-Semitic fury by defiant local Nazis, apparently with policy connections and even some official tolerance.”¹⁰

An analysis of Kissinger and Latin America requires scholarly balance. I have learned through my teaching experience at universities in Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, and Ecuador that the very mention of Henry Kissinger’s

name agitates Latin Americans. Latin Americans hold Kissinger responsible for the tragedy of Chile. In a lecture in November 2016 at the Universidad Nacional in Bogotá, I suggested that Kissinger often backed Latin American countries in disputes with U.S. corporations. He judged, for example, that the International Petroleum Corporation, a subsidiary of Standard Oil of New Jersey, had violated standard business practices during its time in Peru. While in Lima in 1976, Kissinger informed Peruvian officials that economic issues should not disrupt relations between governments. He added, “I do not like us to act as lawyers for private companies.”¹¹ Such information prompted an able Colombian graduate student to remark that Kissinger must be “schizophrenic.” Harsh assessments of Kissinger are not limited to educated Latin Americans. Colleagues who teach Latin American history in the United States have told me at scholarly conferences that they could not study Kissinger and Latin America with detachment.

Both Kissinger’s contested reputation and his importance to the history of the Western Hemisphere provide the most compelling answers to the question “Why write a book about Kissinger and Latin America?” The recent declassification of U.S. documents allows for a comprehensive investigation of the foreign policies of the Nixon and Ford administrations toward Latin America and Kissinger’s central role in formulating and implementing those policies.

Kissinger Historiography

An examination of Kissinger and Latin America must be grounded in the copious Kissinger literature. Jussi Hanhimäki coined the term “Kissingerology” to label the historiography of the Kissinger years. Studies of Kissinger tended to break two ways. Authors either focused on “Dr. Kissinger,” the erudite, skilled practitioner of diplomacy, *realpolitik*, and *détente*, or on “Mr. Henry,” the devious, power-hungry war criminal. Kissinger was the “most admired and hated” diplomat in U.S. history.¹² Respected scholar Barbara Keys bluntly characterized the debate as “the Kissinger wars: the high-stakes contest over how to appraise the record of America’s most controversial statesman.”¹³ In his magisterial study *The Flawed Architect*, Hanhimäki tried to break out of the intellectual straitjacket. Kissinger had significant triumphs in

managing the Soviet-American relationship and working to reduce the chances of nuclear conflict. But Kissinger's belief in the centrality of bilateral Soviet-American relations blinded him to Third World issues and left him "too willing to view them as mere test cases for the 'rules' of Soviet-American détente." Kissinger's and Nixon's overreaction to the election of Salvador Allende was an example of this traditional "Cold War logic." In attacking Allende, Kissinger and Nixon had carried on the policies of the Eisenhower, Kennedy, and Johnson administrations when they perceived leftist movements in Guatemala, British Guiana, or Brazil as existential threats to U.S. national security. Hanhimäki hoped that future scholars would understand that if Kissinger was a war criminal, most foreign-policy makers in the Cold War were criminals. Hanhimäki pleaded for scholars to place Kissinger in historical context and analyze why U.S. officials failed "to grasp the intrinsic significance of local and regional circumstances to the unfolding of the Cold War." Hanhimäki conceded, however, that future research on Kissinger's policies toward Africa, the Middle East, and Latin America would inevitably highlight the dark "Mr. Henry" side of Kissinger.¹⁴

Mario Del Pero, Walter Isaacson, Jeremi Suri, and Niall Ferguson among others have offered Dr. Kissinger-style interpretations. Taking a European perspective, Del Pero dubbed Kissinger an "eccentric realist." Like Hanhimäki, he credited Kissinger for the opening to China, détente, and ending the war in Vietnam. Kissinger also understood "realism" in international relations—"being cognizant of power realities, the unalterable features of the international system, the rules and practices of such a system, and placing the national interest above any other concern." But Kissinger's realism "lacked, ultimately, the necessary dose of realism." Del Pero agreed with Hanhimäki that Kissinger adhered to a "rigid bipolarism." He interpreted the growth of leftist political movements in Portugal and Italy as gains for the Soviet Union and the international communist movement. The "entirely bipolar horizon" of his thoughts and policies led to intervention in Chile. Kissinger often spoke of practicing a "nuanced" foreign policy but rarely followed his own dictum.¹⁵

The journalist Walter Isaacson penned in 1992 a popular and compelling biography of Kissinger that was reissued in 2005 with a new introduction. Isaacson had special access to Kissinger but fell out of the diplomat's good graces because of his critical approach. Kissinger cared "obsessively" about his public standing. Like Hanhimäki and Del Pero, Isaacson pointed to a tragic

flaw in Kissinger's diplomacy. His substantial achievement of triangular diplomacy with the Soviet Union and China was undermined by his fondness for secrecy. The public came to doubt Kissinger's diplomacy. Kissinger had fallen under Nixon's "dark" tutelage. The two men distrusted the national security bureaucracy, Congress, and the public. They conducted international relations through "back channels," more because "it suited their personalities than because it suited the security interests of the nation." The two had "a romantic view of themselves as loners." Knowledge was power, and power was not to be shared. In the view of veteran diplomat and future secretary of state Lawrence Eagleburger, Kissinger and Nixon took "a conspiratorial approach to foreign-policy management."¹⁶ The back channel that Kissinger established in early 1969 with Ambassador Anatoli Dobrynin of the Soviet Union became well known. Nixon also ordered Kissinger in 1971 to establish a back channel with Emílio Garrastazú Médici (1969–1974). Nixon and Kissinger preferred that the Brazilian president take the lead in destabilizing governments in Bolivia, Chile, and Uruguay and keep the United States' hand hidden.¹⁷

Jeremi Suri presented a unique interpretation within the "Dr. Kissinger" framework. Suri judged Kissinger "a good man" who believed in the moral significance of his adopted country. Kissinger had witnessed the collapse of democracies in Europe during World War II. The Jewish Kissinger and his family had fled the Nazi menace, and Kissinger had returned to war-torn Europe as a soldier in the U.S. Army. Suri theorized that Jewish immigrants endorsed the preservation U.S. power, because a formidable United States would protect them from the hatred and violence they had suffered in Europe. In Kissinger's words, he "had seen evil in the world," and this historical experience led him to believe "that there are some things you have to fight for, and that you can't insist that everything be to some ideal construction you have made." Suri agreed that Kissinger "entered politics for moral reasons, and he worked feverishly to make the world better." Kissinger believed that he acted within the bounds of a moral compass, although he declined to elaborate on his moral principles in interviews with Suri. Although sympathetic to Kissinger, Suri conceded that Kissinger's diplomacy "did not always contribute to the world of greater freedom and justice." Suri absolved Nixon and Kissinger from orchestrating the overthrow of Allende, but the two "did encourage and facilitate" the action. To his credit, Suri became the first

Kissinger scholar to point out that the secretary of state seemed indifferent to mass killings in Argentina in 1976. During the Cold War, most presidential administrations worked with anticommunist dictators. Suri admitted that Kissinger made support for dictators central to U.S. policy.¹⁸

Compared to Niall Ferguson, Suri had written a critical account of Kissinger's public life. Ferguson's first volume of a projected two-volume study analyzed Kissinger's life from 1923 to 1968. Ferguson argued that in his years as a soldier, student, and university professor, Kissinger had developed a knowledge and philosophy of history that most strategic options involved choosing between greater and lesser evils and that it was an inherently moral act to choose the lesser evil. Scholars had erred in dubbing Kissinger a "realist." Ferguson wrote, "In aspiring to loftier ends, I believe the young Kissinger was indeed an idealist." Although focusing on Kissinger's intellectual, moral, and philosophical development, Ferguson took on with relish the "war criminal" thesis both in his opening chapter and in response to reviews of his book. If Kissinger acted criminally, so too did Eisenhower and Dulles when they attacked Guatemala in 1954. Guatemalan security forces murdered at least 200,000 people over the next four decades. General Pinochet presided over the murder of only 3,279 Chileans. Perhaps Ferguson might have elaborated that the Pinochet regime tortured 100,000 Chileans and forced 200,000 into exile, a staggering number of victims in a country of 10 million. Kissinger chose to confront the "hostile and heavily armed" Soviet Union, Marxism-Leninism, and the international communist movement—the transcendent evils. In any case, Ferguson continued, "arguments that focus on loss of life in strategically marginal countries—and there is no other way of describing Argentina, Bangladesh, Cambodia, Chile, Cyprus, East Timor—must be tested against this question: how, in each case, would an alternate decision have affected U.S. relations with strategically important countries like the Soviet Union, China, and the major Western European powers?"¹⁹ An Argentine *abuela* (grandmother) whose pregnant daughter was slaughtered after giving birth and still searches for her now middle-aged *apropiado* (appropriated) grandchild might object to Ferguson's prioritizing scheme. So too, an Argentine Jew, if he had survived, might wonder why his humiliation, which included having swastikas painted on his back and being forced to say, "Heil Hitler," facilitated Cold War victory. Military thugs saved the cruelest form of death for Argentine Jews—using a recto scope to release a rat in an

anus or vagina. The rat would eat his way through the person's organs seeking escape. The "idealistic" Kissinger averted his eyes from what scholars have labeled "genocide."²⁰

In quantity, if not quality, most Kissinger studies have been on the "Mr. Henry" side of the equation. John Lee Anderson, Gary J. Bass, Robert K. Brigham, Robert Dallek, Ariel Dorfman, Greg Grandin, Seymour Hersh, Christopher Hitchens, Barbara Keys, Tim Naftali, and a plethora of historians of twentieth-century Latin America have written critical studies of various intensities on Kissinger. An exploration of the ideas of Hitchens, Bass, and Grandin can serve as a representative sample. Perhaps the most influential of the "Mr. Henry" books has been Hitchens's *The Trial of Henry Kissinger*. In a relentless style, Hitchens indicted Kissinger for war crimes in Bangladesh, Chile, Cyprus, East Timor, and Indochina. Hitchens held Kissinger responsible for the assassination of General René Schneider, the top Chilean military officer who opposed subverting the Chilean constitution to prevent Allende from becoming president in 1970. In Hitchens's words, Kissinger had engaged in "the personal suborning and planning of murder, of a senior constitutional officer in a democratic nation—Chile—with which the United States was not at war." In the Chilean case, Kissinger displayed his "contempt for democracy."²¹ Thoughtful scholars such as Hanhimäki preferred to say that Kissinger was guilty of the crime of "short-sighted" policies for viewing local and regional developments within the prism of the Soviet-American confrontation. But as indicated by Ferguson's lecture on the strategic irrelevance of Argentina and Chile, every Kissinger scholar has seemed obligated to respond to Hitchens.

Hitchens could not have chosen a more effective prosecuting attorney than Gary Bass. His book on Nixon and Kissinger's roles in the "forgotten genocide" in Bangladesh (East Pakistan) in 1971 has garnered acclaim and book prizes. On 28 March 1971, the U.S. consul in Dacca, Archer Blood, went outside the normal chain of command in sending an extraordinary cable to Washington with the subject line "Selective Genocide." The Pakistani government in Islamabad had cracked down on its restive Bengali population, targeting the Hindu minority and killing 200,000 people. Another ten million people fled to India. For both strategic and humanitarian reasons, India, led by Indira Gandhi, went to war in December 1971 against Pakistan to save the people of Bangladesh. Most global citizens applauded Prime Minister Gandhi's

rescue mission. Nixon and Kissinger, however, downplayed the horrific events in Bangladesh, trashed the career of Consul Blood, and secretly and illegally armed Pakistan. The U.S. leaders had a visceral dislike of Indians and spoke of their prime minister as a “bitch” and an “old witch.” Presumably, the administration’s “moral” choice of the lesser of two evils was to preserve the balance of power. Pakistan was allied with the United States and opposed both India and its patron, the Soviet Union. Pakistan had also aided the Nixon administration in its opening toward China. In Bass’s judgment, Nixon and Kissinger bore “responsibility for significant complicity in the slaughter of the Bengalis.” Their “biggest success” in promoting themselves as “heroes” of diplomacy “has been the historical oblivion that surrounds the killing campaign in Bangladesh.”²²

Greg Grandin has also taken on the role of informing the public of Kissinger’s perfidy. In *Kissinger’s Shadow*, he argued that Kissinger had remained influential within the universe of conservative policy makers. Kissinger’s “long reach” included providing the intellectual justification for the invasion of Iraq in 2003. Kissinger’s philosophy of history was that “risk is a requirement of real statesmanship, that initiative creates its own reality, and that political leaders shouldn’t wait on facts to seize the initiative.” The United States would create its own reality when it overthrew Saddam Hussein.²³ It mattered not whether weapons of mass destruction existed in Iraq. Whereas it might be problematic to reason that the George W. Bush administration thought deeply about Kissinger’s ideas, Grandin’s analysis of Kissinger’s sway demonstrated the intensity of disdain that Kissinger engendered among scholars. Barbara Keys characterized Grandin as the standard bearer for the “Kissinger-as-evil-mastermind camp.”²⁴ Grandin, who served as a consultant to Guatemala’s Historical Clarification Commission, the international body that investigated the abuses of human rights in Guatemala from 1954 to 1996, included a brief, damning section on Kissinger and Latin America in *Kissinger’s Shadow*.

Although Kissinger’s career has generated an enormous scholarly output, Kissinger served under Presidents Richard Nixon and Gerald Ford. Yet historians have focused on Kissinger, because his relationships with his bosses were peculiar. Nixon and Kissinger took pains in their respective memoirs to portray themselves as the sole architect of U.S. foreign policy and to downplay the other’s contribution. Listening to the two men talk on tape has led analysts

to offer nuanced interpretations of the relationship. Kissinger endlessly and unctuously flattered Nixon. Nixon, on the other hand, used Kissinger as a sounding board for some of his bizarre ideas. As Suri put it, "In his daily behavior and rhetoric, Nixon acted more like a gangster than a statesman."²⁵ Douglas Brinkley and Luke Nichter, who edited two volumes of the Nixon tapes, agreed that "Nixon was a ruthless political operator."²⁶ They emphasized, however, that Nixon kept full control of the White House's foreign-policy agenda. Studies by John A. Farrell and Tim Weiner on Nixon have tended to second the findings of Brinkley and Nichter.²⁷ Suri took a distinctive approach, suggesting that Kissinger tied himself to Nixon, because "he could never escape the nightmare of anti-Semitism." He sought the protection of a powerful figure because he feared losing everything, even as he endured Nixon's anti-Semitic rants.²⁸ Presidential historian Robert Dallek conversely saw the men as "partners in power," with Kissinger serving as "a kind of co-president." Dallek asserted that the two men "had few qualms about making a bargain with the devil."²⁹ Tom Blanton agreed, characterizing the relationship as "the gangster den."³⁰ In his review of the relationship, Robert Schulzinger resorted to popular psychology, using terms like "exceptionally needy" and "complex co-dependency." Nixon and Kissinger developed a bunker mentality, perceiving that they were surrounded by adversaries, enemies, fools, and knaves.³¹

Whereas Nixon and Kissinger may have clung to one another, it did not signify that they admired one another. In his memoirs, Nixon cited Secretary of State William Rogers's judgment that Kissinger was "Machiavellian, deceitful, egotistical, arrogant, and insulting." Nixon did not dispute Rogers's analysis of Kissinger. He also disparaged Kissinger in conversations with White House Chief of Staff H. R. Haldeman. Kissinger "is a terribly difficult individual to have around," Nixon lamented. He wanted to be national security adviser, secretary of state, and de facto secretary of defense. Kissinger would become "a dictator." Kissinger had a "personality thing." For his part, Kissinger disparaged Nixon's stability in telephone conversations with Rogers and Secretary of Defense Melvin R. Laird, noting the president's penchant for wanting to bomb countries on the flimsiest of pretexts. Kissinger indicated in his memoirs that Nixon was obsessed with Chile and Cuba. In a telephone conversation with Kissinger, Nixon sustained that judgment. He told Kissinger, "Probably only you know how strongly I feel about the Cuban business." The

president promised to write “an eyes only” memorandum for Kissinger on Cuba and Allende’s Chile, explaining, “so you will know in the future how far I am willing to go.”³²

Kissinger’s thirty-month relationship with Gerald Ford has not been the subject of psychological analysis. President Ford relied on Kissinger for foreign policy and strategy, accepting Nixon’s recommendation that Kissinger was “absolutely indispensable.” Although loyal to Kissinger, Ford ordered Kissinger to relinquish his national security adviser position when, in November 1975, he carried out a major restructuring of his cabinet. Ford believed he needed to strengthen his position with political conservatives. Governor Ronald Reagan of California, who challenged Ford for the Republican presidential nomination in 1976, criticized Kissinger for both his détente policies with the Soviet Union and for negotiating over the future status of the Panama Canal.³³ Kissinger offered respectful comments about Ford in his memoirs. He claimed that “I was close to the president,” that there was “a mood of mutual confidence,” and that their interactions were “cordial and businesslike.” He further noted that Ford detested gossip; Kissinger and Nixon had gossiped endlessly. In private, Kissinger may have taken a different tone toward his boss. Joseph Sisco, a friend and adviser to Kissinger on the Middle East, remembered that Kissinger judged Ford “a decent man, but he did not give him very high grades intellectually.”³⁴ When Ford assumed office in August 1974, Kissinger told him not to be just a caretaker but to run for the presidency in 1976. Kissinger had confidence that a victorious President Ford would keep him on as secretary of state. Kissinger informed Latin Americans that he planned to shepherd a new treaty with Panama through Congress in 1977.

Declassified records demonstrate that Kissinger had more freedom to conduct policy with Latin America under Ford than under Nixon. But Kissinger had his way in both administrations. Nixon deemed himself an expert on global affairs, and he issued directives on Latin American policy. Both as national security adviser and later as secretary of state, Kissinger had little trouble with Nixon’s dictums. Neither man cared whether democrats or military dictators ruled in individual countries. They cared about fighting communism. Kissinger’s hatred of Salvador Allende may have surpassed that of Nixon’s. Nixon reflexively defended U.S. multinational corporations in Latin America. On investment, trade, and treaty issues, Kissinger temporized, even circumvented, Nixon’s harsh views through all manners of diplomatic

subtleties. Nixon had a visceral hatred of Fidel Castro, and these feelings slowed Kissinger's desire to explore an accommodation with Cuba. Once Ford assumed office, Kissinger took complete charge of inter-American relations, including contacting Cubans. Ford confined himself to hosting pleasant Oval Office meetings with visiting Latin American officials. Ford interjected himself only in relations with the oil-producing nation of Venezuela. He pleaded with President Carlos Andrés Pérez to use his influence within the Organization of Petroleum Countries (OPEC) to moderate oil prices.³⁵ High gasoline and fuel oil prices in the United States were jeopardizing President Ford's electoral prospects.

The lack of access to the archival record had kept scholars from exploring the topic of Kissinger and Latin America. As Mark Atwood Lawrence lamented in a bibliographic essay, no book directly addressed inter-American issues between 1969 and 1977.³⁶ In 1988, political scientist Michael J. Francis wrote a sound article that surveyed Kissinger's approach to the region. He concluded that the Nixon and Ford administrations wanted to accommodate Latin Americans on nonstrategic issues. But if the issue was perceived as having Cold War significance, then Kissinger and his presidents "were willing to play very rough." The attack on Allende and the subsequent U.S. support for General Pinochet proved that point. Francis concluded, however, that Nixon, Ford, and Kissinger displayed "a fundamental lack of interest in Latin America."³⁷ In preparing his article, Francis had no access to archival materials or primary sources other than congressional hearings conducted in 1975 by Senator Frank Church (D-ID) on the U.S. intervention in Chile.

Both in his bibliographic essay and in an essay in an edited collection on U.S. foreign relations, Lawrence surveyed inter-American relations. Like Francis, he concluded that "Latin America ranked at the bottom" of U.S. global priorities. Lawrence focused on a few flash points—the Soviet submarine base at Cienfuegos, the overthrow of Allende, and Operation Condor, the assassination project of South America's dictators. Lawrence ended his cursory review by noting that scholars needed to move beyond talking about the tragedy of Allende's Chile. Further research would show "that Chile was only the most egregious example of an approach practiced across the hemisphere." Lawrence predicted that with new scrutiny the reputations of Nixon and Kissinger were "likely to sink further still."³⁸

As Lawrence indicated, scholars have produced strong analyses of the U.S. intervention in Chile because they have had available to them since 1999 the U.S. archival record. Democratic Chile has also assisted historical research by opening records and conducting public trials of the Pinochet-era abusers of human rights. Tanya Harmer produced in *Allende's Chile and the Inter-American Cold War* an authoritative study that places Chile within an international context. Jonathan Haslam dissected Allende's baffling economic policies that created a sense of crisis within the nation. And Peter Kornbluh of the National Security Archive published documents that contradicted what Kissinger had publicly said and written about his relationship with General Pinochet.³⁹ Prior to the mass declassification of documents that began in 2015, the National Security Archive used the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) to release documents on inter-American relations during the Kissinger years. These studies informed bilateral studies on U.S. policies toward Argentina, Brazil, and Cuba.⁴⁰

What retarded studies on U.S. policies toward Latin America from 1969 to 1977 was not solely the incomplete documentary record. Scholars have assumed they would find nothing historically significant if they embarked on a study. Mark Lawrence wrote, for example, that neither Nixon nor Kissinger went south of Mexico. In fact, Secretary of State Kissinger traveled throughout South America. Lawrence and others have also cited the principals' disdain for the region. Nixon declared on tape in 1971 that "the only thing that matters in this world is Japan and China, Russia and Europe."⁴¹ Two years previously, Kissinger had famously told the Chilean foreign minister that "nothing important can come from the South" and that "history has never been produced in the South." He added, "The axis of history starts in Moscow, goes to Bonn, crosses over to Washington, and then goes to Tokyo."⁴² Those who have quoted Kissinger have probably not placed his rudeness in context. Kissinger's insult followed a contentious conversation between Foreign Minister Gabriel Valdés and Nixon over foreign aid. In any case, it would be foolish to challenge the conventional wisdom on the foreign policy priorities of the Nixon and Ford administrations. Nonetheless, the two presidential administrations conducted foreign policies in Latin America. The exercise of U.S. power had both positive and dire ramifications for Latin Americans in the 1970s. And in his interactions with Latin American officials, Kissinger perhaps

revealed more about his philosophy of government and international relations than he did in either his memoirs or in his interviews with scholars.

Chapter Themes

This book takes a topical approach and does not progress in a strictly chronological manner. Chapter 1 outlines the state of inter-American relations in the middle of the Cold War. President Nixon came to office in 1969 in the aftermath of the Alliance for Progress, the ambitious ten-year, \$20 billion economic aid program announced by President Kennedy in March 1961. Richard Nixon had strong views about the shortcomings of the Alliance for Progress. Unlike Kissinger, who had limited familiarity with Latin American thought, culture, and society, Nixon judged himself knowledgeable about Latin America. Nixon directed Kissinger to develop a comprehensive review of the U.S. policies toward Latin America. Kissinger threw himself into the exercise with enthusiasm, perceiving the review of trade, investment, aid, and security issues as a learning experience. Nixon also dispatched his political rival and Kissinger's mentor, Governor Nelson Rockefeller (R-NY), on a fact-finding mission to Latin America.⁴³

The first crisis for the new administration came with the news that leftist Salvador Allende had captured a plurality of the vote in the September 1970 presidential election. Chapter 2 reviews the U.S. role in destabilizing the Allende government. The historical literature tends to give scant attention to the United States and Chile after 11 September 1973. To recount the complete story about the U.S. role in Chile demands investigating not only the war against Allende but also the myriad of ways that the Nixon and Ford administrations and Secretary of State Kissinger bolstered the Pinochet dictatorship. Chapter 2 also analyzes Kissinger's lead role in encouraging the overthrow of President Juan José Torres (1970–1971), the socialist political and military leader of Bolivia.

Torres's overthrow leads to a discussion of Kissinger's relationship with military dictatorships. In Chapter 3, U.S. policies toward Paraguay, Brazil, and Uruguay are analyzed. What is evident is that the secretary of state was comfortable and loquacious in the presence of men who authorized mass murder, torture, and terrorism. His most revealing memorandums of conversations on political philosophy are with military dictators and their minions.

Argentina emulated its South American neighbors when the military seized power in March 1976. Argentina's military rulers thought it would be in the

nation's best interest to eliminate 50,000 Argentines. Secretary Kissinger was made aware of the Argentine military's campaign of murder by U.S. officials in Washington and Buenos Aires. His aides further warned him that Argentina's murderers and torturers targeted Argentina's Jewish population. Chapter 4 further examines Secretary Kissinger's response to Operation Condor, a conspiracy of South American military dictatorships that perpetrated international assassinations and terrorism.

Chapter 5 shifts the focus from South America and explores U.S. relations with Central America during the Kissinger years. In the 1980s, civil wars in El Salvador, Nicaragua, and Guatemala frightened the Reagan administration into reasoning that the Cold War had come to the doorstep of the United States. The civil wars in El Salvador and Nicaragua erupted during Kissinger's tenure (in 1972 and 1974, respectively). Wholesale political violence carried out by "death squads" continued to characterize life in Guatemala in the 1970s. Examining the U.S. response to the mounting right-wing oppression in Central America provides historical background to the crisis of the 1980s and deepens an understanding of Kissinger's worldviews. Whereas Kissinger may have been impervious to Central American violence, he acted boldly toward Panama, pushing both of his presidents to renegotiate U.S. control of the canal and the Canal Zone.

Security concerns did not always dominate Kissinger's approach to relations with Latin America in the 1970s. Chapter 6 demonstrates that Kissinger engaged in resolving inter-American trade, investment, and treaty disputes. He responded imaginatively to Latin American grievances over water rights, tuna fishing, multinational corporations, and oil prices.

The last chapter examines two major initiatives of Kissinger that ended in failure. Kissinger proved amenable to discussing reforms to the international economic order but abruptly concluded that such hemispheric discussions shifted the balance of power against the United States. He also worked on a plan to break out of the diplomatic stalemate with Fidel Castro's Cuba. He reasoned that if the United States could open a relationship with the People's Republic of China, it could also do so with communist Cuba. Kissinger believed, however, that Cuba had to accept a subordinate position in the global order. Fidel Castro declined to become subservient to the United States.

The concluding section of the book offers a judgment of Kissinger in Latin America. The customary approach for historians is to ask first the "change and

continuity” question. Scholars sympathetic to Kissinger were troubled by Kissinger’s actions in Latin America and fell back on the argument that his policies were no different than those of his predecessors or successors. Critical scholars assumed that Kissinger’s actions in Chile and throughout Latin America were unprecedented in their depravity. What cannot be ignored is that the gross violation of human rights that marked life in the 1970s was unprecedented in the history of Latin America in the national period. Responsibility for the murders, disappearances, and tortures must be assigned.

The assessment of the thoughts and policies of Henry A. Kissinger toward Latin America will also add to prevailing historiography or “Kissingerology.” Kissinger pointed to the “warmth and affection” that he received from Latin Americans. Perhaps this sense of well-being and comradery led Kissinger to be remarkably candid about his philosophy of life, government, and international relations in his extended conversations with Latin American democrats and dictators.