

Henry Kissinger and the crimes of American imperialism

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Henry Kissinger, the oldest unindicted war criminal on the planet, died Wednesday, November 29, at his home in Connecticut. While he lived to be 100 years old and advised 12 presidents, Kissinger is most hated by the people of the world for the crimes he perpetrated and oversaw from 1969 through 1975, in the Nixon and Ford administrations, when he controlled foreign policy as National Security Council director and then as secretary of state. For most of his tenure, he held both jobs, the only US government official to do so.

The WSWWS will publish a further analysis of Kissinger's career, but today we are reposting the perspective published May 29, 2023, when the mass murderer and imperialist strategist reached the age of 100 and was widely celebrated in the corporate media.

*I met Murder on the way
He had a mask like Castlereagh
Very smooth he looked, yet grim
Seven bloodhounds followed him.
All were fat; and well they might
Be in admirable plight,
For one by one, and two by two,
He tossed them human hearts to chew
Which from his wide cloak he drew.*

—Percy Bysshe Shelley, *The Mask of Anarchy*

A commentary in the liberal Jewish publication *Forward* suggests that these lines from Shelley, directed against Lord Castlereagh, the reactionary British foreign minister of his time, would apply equally well to Henry Kissinger, the former US secretary of state, who turned 100 years old on Friday, May 27.

It is a more than justified comparison of two enemies of human freedom and social revolution. Castlereagh defended the British Empire and sought to suppress revolution in its colonies, especially Ireland, and destroy the legacy and influence of the French Revolution.

Kissinger has devoted his long life to the defense of American imperialism and the destruction of the legacy and influence of the Russian Revolution. He may have been born a German Jew and escaped the Holocaust when his family fled to America, but he allied himself with the very forces that had sponsored and cheered on Hitler, and which encouraged Hitler's imitators in fascist and authoritarian regimes around the world.

As Kissinger once remarked—with the cynicism that became a trademark and passed for “wit” among his admirers in bourgeois political and media circles—“If it had not been for the accident of my birth, I would have been an antisemite.”

At a meeting of top Turkish and US officials in Ankara in 1975, after Kissinger suggested that the Nixon administration could arrange to have allies provide critical military supplies to Turkey after a congressional vote banned US aid, the US ambassador blurted out, “That is illegal.”

Kissinger replied, “Before the Freedom of Information Act, I used to say at meetings, ‘The illegal we do immediately; the unconstitutional takes a little longer.’ [Laughter] But since the Freedom of Information Act, I’m afraid to say things like that.”

The secret transcript of this meeting was only made available by WikiLeaks in 2011, 36 years later.

Kissinger was directly in charge of US foreign policy as national security adviser and then as secretary of state from 1969 to 1976, a critical period of worldwide revolutionary upsurge of the working class and oppressed peoples. In every country where American imperialism intervened, either with military force or political subversion or propping up bloodstained dictatorships, he played a sinister role.

At least one million people died in Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia during the period of Kissinger's direction of American policy, most of them killed by US bombs, incinerated by US napalm or poisoned by US chemicals like Agent Orange. Many were simply massacred by American troops even as Nixon and Kissinger voiced the usual lies about America defending “freedom” and “democracy” against communism.

The Nixon administration proclaimed a policy of “Vietnamization” and began the long-drawn-out process of negotiations with North Vietnam and the National Liberation Front. Throughout these seven years, American soldiers, nearly all draftees from the working class, continued to die, adding another 30,000 to the death toll.

The war crimes in Southeast Asia are innumerable, but the most important include the secret bombing of Cambodia and Laos, the 1970 invasion of Cambodia that set the stage for the rise of the Khmer Rouge and Pol Pot, and the “Christmas bombing” of Hanoi and Haiphong, the major urban centers of North Vietnam.

In 1973, the Nobel Peace Prize was awarded jointly to Kissinger and the chief North Vietnamese negotiator at the Paris talks, Le Duc Tho. Kissinger did not go to Norway to collect his award, fearful of the likely mass protests. Le Duc Tho refused his award altogether.

In Latin America, Kissinger oversaw a wave of military coups and the imposition of dictatorships, most notably in Chile in September 1973, when Augusto Pinochet launched his CIA-backed military overthrow of the reformist regime of Salvador Allende. It ended in the death of Allende and the torture and murder of tens of thousands of Chilean workers and political activists.

It was about Chile that Kissinger made one his most notorious and oft-quoted remarks, telling a meeting of the top secret 40 Committee before the 1970 Chilean elections, won by Allende, “I don’t see why we need to stand by and watch a country go Communist due to the irresponsibility of its own people.” He wrote later of the bloody 1973 coup, “The Chilean military had saved Chile from a totalitarian regime and the United States from an enemy.”

Similar coups followed in Argentina, Uruguay and Bolivia, and these dictators joined forces with military regimes of longer standing in Brazil and Paraguay to mount Operation Condor, a joint venture of the region's

secret police and the American CIA to hunt down and kill revolutionary exiles and leftists of all kinds.

There were equally reactionary events in other parts of the world in which Kissinger is implicated: the Indonesian invasion of East Timor in 1975; the military slaughter in Bangladesh in 1971; US support and aid for dictatorial regimes in Spain, Portugal, Greece, Saudi Arabia and Iran; US support for the ultra-right insurgencies against nationalist regimes in Angola and Mozambique; US backing for the Canberra Coup, which ousted the elected Labor Party government of Australian Prime Minister Gough Whitlam.

In the Middle East, Kissinger helped stave off the military defeat of Israel in the 1973 Arab-Israeli war, rushing huge volumes of military equipment to the Zionist state, and then bribed the Egyptian regime of Anwar Sadat to change sides in the Cold War and become an American rather than a Soviet client.

In world geopolitics, Kissinger is most identified with the policy of taking advantage of the split between the Soviet Union and China, both under Stalinist rule, as these bureaucratic police states vied with each other for global influence, a reactionary nationalist conflict that even erupted into military clashes along the border between Chinese Manchuria and the Soviet Far East.

The central thrust of Kissinger's simultaneous embrace of détente with Moscow and the ending of the decades-long US policy of non-recognition of Beijing was to enlist the aid of the Stalinists against revolutionary struggles in Southeast Asia and throughout the world. It is this policy which is the most celebrated in US imperialist circles and accounts for Kissinger's ability to exert continued influence decades after he left office.

When the Nixon-Ford administration ended its eight years in office and Democrat Jimmy Carter entered the White House, he publicly pledged to make the defense of "human rights" the basis of US foreign policy. This was aimed at counteracting the stench of Kissinger's crimes. However, nothing changed but the packaging. The crimes of American imperialism were now embellished with cynical references to the "humanitarian" concerns supposedly determining the actions of the CIA, Pentagon and State Department.

In later years, Kissinger's accomplices in the Nixon-Ford administration constituted a who's who of American war criminals. While Kissinger was secretary of state, George H. W. Bush, the future president, was CIA director. Donald Rumsfeld, White House chief of staff and then secretary of defense, returned to the Pentagon in 2001, where he oversaw US interventions in Iraq and Afghanistan. Richard Cheney succeeded Rumsfeld as White House chief of staff, and in 2001 was vice president to George W. Bush and the principal warmonger in that administration.

After the 9/11 terrorist attacks in New York and Washington, George W. Bush appointed Kissinger to head a bipartisan commission to investigate, with a Democratic vice chair, former Senator George Mitchell. The congressional Democrats approved this arrangement, but public protests threatened to discredit the commission even before it could begin, and Kissinger had to step down.

As the WSWS noted at the time, "Selecting Kissinger to head this body amounts to an admission that the US government has much to hide in relation to September 11, and that the Bush administration, working in tandem with the congressional Democrats and the media, is determined to bury the truth."

We also pointed out the growing notoriety of Kissinger internationally:

Kissinger can no longer travel freely in Europe and Latin America. He had to cancel a trip to Brazil last year because of human rights protests. He was sought for questioning by French police during a visit to Paris, in a case involving a French citizen

murdered by the US-backed military dictatorship in Chile. He is the subject of lawsuits in Chile and the US for his role in the assassination of General Rene Schneider, the Chilean military commander whose elimination paved the way for the dictatorship of General Augusto Pinochet.

Today this opprobrium is expressed on the internet, as the *Washington Post* noted in an article Sunday in its Style section, which cited the widespread social media preparation to celebrate Kissinger's inevitable death and the overwhelming disgust and hatred for his crimes among millions of young people who were not even born when he headed the State Department.

For the most part, the media has been nervous about commenting on Kissinger's 100 years, fearing the implications of any, even sanitized, review of his record. In a noteworthy and particularly guilty silence, the *New York Times* has not yet published an article on the subject.

It is a demonstration of how far to the right American foreign policy has moved that in recent years, Kissinger has been cited occasionally as a "moderate" critic of undue American aggressiveness, particularly in relation to China. (He is a fervent supporter of the war in Ukraine.) In his 2012 volume, *On China*, he warned that the US was adopting the same policy towards China as imperial Britain toward rising Germany in the period leading up to World War I, which made open military conflict inevitable.

There is no doubt, however, of the deeply reactionary character of his politics. In 1985, he publicly supported Ronald Reagan's visit to a Waffen-SS military cemetery in Bitburg, West Germany, where the US president laid a wreath.

In 1973, he made a revealing remark to Richard Nixon, after a meeting with Israeli Prime Minister Golda Meir, who pressed him on the question of permitting Soviet Jews to leave the USSR (with the hope they would settle in Israel). The tape, made public only in 2010, has Kissinger declaring, "The emigration of Jews from the Soviet Union is not an objective of American foreign policy, and if they put Jews into gas chambers in the Soviet Union, it is not an American concern. Maybe a humanitarian concern."

A much earlier work, *Necessity for Choice*, published in 1961 when he was an academic "expert" on foreign policy at Harvard, sums up his world view: "No more urgent task confronts the free world than to separate itself from nostalgia from the period of its invulnerability and to face the stark reality of a revolutionary period."

It is this hatred and fear of revolution and determination to crush it that underlies every crime with which the centenarian Kissinger—and the myriad imperialist politicians who consulted him, from John F. Kennedy to Hillary Clinton and Joe Biden—is identified.

While Kissinger's criminality was of a particularly overt character, it set a standard for ruthlessness which has continued and indeed deepened in the subsequent development of American imperialism. It is in some way fitting that his 100th year on earth coincides with an escalation of the US-NATO war against Russia that is bringing mankind to the brink of a nuclear catastrophe.

As for the present day representatives of American imperialism, they confront the "stark reality of a revolutionary period" ill equipped to do anything to contain it.



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