

I have a shameful confession to make. I'm beginning to get nostalgic for Henry Kissinger.

Don't get me wrong. Henry Kissinger cozied up to dictators. He engineered covert operations that undermined democrats like Salvador Allende in Chile. He didn't give a tinker's dam about human rights unless it served some larger strategic goal. For these and other smelly orthodoxies of the Kissinger period, I've loathed the man. My political bible for many years was Seymour Hersh's delicious *ad hominem* attack, *The Price of Power*. One day I would like to see Kissinger sweating in the dock of the International Criminal Court.

And yet, I yearn for a dose of Kissinger's brand of pragmatism to be administered to the current group in power in Washington.

According to some, the Bush administration in 2003 has indeed come to its senses and embraced a calculating realpolitik. "The President and his White House foreign policy advisers appear to be on a learning curve," opined *Business Week* back in the pre-quagmire days of January. "As they come up against global realities, they are shifting away from their hard ideological positions toward a more pragmatic approach to world problems."

Nonsense. Pragmatism remains *idea non grata* in the Washington inner circle.

In both Iraq and North Korea, for example, the Bush administration in 2003 has pursued an overarching idea regardless of practical consequences. The Wolfowitz team proposed expanding the "zone of democracy" in the Middle East, beginning in Iraq, without fully considering the feasibility or popularity of the notion. Sure, everyone could agree that Saddam was a horror. Beyond that, not much unites the Iraqi people and the U.S. occupation forces. Democracy involves a large measure of self-determination. It may well lead the Iraqi people to support a government that poses just as much of a threat to U.S. interests as the Baathists. As such, democracy may well be the last thing that Iraqis get out of the war and occupation.

In North Korea, meanwhile, the Bush administration remains committed to the idea of regime change. It doesn't have any particular alternative to the current North Korean leadership. Nor does it seem to care about the consequences of regime change: a massive humanitarian crisis, a dangerous leadership vacuum and a whole lot of lethal weapons suddenly up for grabs in a country with porous borders. Sure, the administration has decided in 2003 to sit down to talk in multilateral discussions. But here's the catch: the hardliners know full well that multilateral talks will not likely produce an agreement. In the meantime, they are pushing forward with the destabilization of the North Korean regime by draining its military resources through maneuvers and exercises near the

border and by tightening the economic screws through cuts in humanitarian aid and greater restrictions on exports and imports.

Such ideological fixations do not simply pertain to the "axis of evil." In Europe, the days of the murky Trilateral Commission are long over. I get teary-eyed when I think back to how close the United States and Germany used to be. Now Germany is a member of Old Europe. In pursuit of unilateral power, the Bush administration continues to rile the Europeans on agricultural issues, biotechnology, relations with Iran, and multilateral agreements such as Kyoto and the International Criminal Court. In 2003, U.S. relations with Old Europe only worsened over the war in Iraq and the battle over genetically modified food.

Then there's Cuba. Recently, the Bush administration fined a woman \$10,000 for distributing Bibles in Cuba because she violated the Trading with the Enemy Act. Bibles! Such trafficking in chapter and verse should have warmed the administration's evangelical heart. But here too the administration is so committed to the strangulation of the island that it will cut off its nose to spite its face.

These ideas—of a zone of democracy in the Middle East, regime change in North Korea and Cuba, unrivaled world power—define the ideologues in Washington. Heading into an election year, they continue to butt their heads up against global realities and to treat pragmatism as a form of appeasement.

What would Henry have to say about all this? He still plumps for cooperation: "The dominant trend in American foreign-policy thinking must be to transform power into consensus so that the international order is based on agreement rather than reluctant acquiescence." On Iraq policy, Kissinger cautioned the Senate in 2002 that "it cannot be either in the American national interest or the world's interest to develop principles that grant every nation an unfettered right of preemption against its own definition of threats to its security." He's leery of expanding the zone of democracy in the Middle East for that would undermine his friends in autocratic Saudi Arabia. He knows that war and chaos on the Korean peninsula could threaten the business interests in China that bring him and his cronies so much loot. He'd never enrage the Europeans—after all, he is the quintessential old European, his perspective shaped more by European history than American exceptionalism. As for Cuba, Kissinger flirted with détente with Fidel in 1974 and 1975 and urged a review of U.S. policy in 1998.

Am I romanticizing Henry Kissinger? He unconditionally backs the war on terrorism and the maintenance of unilateral U.S. power. He supports more pragmatic alternatives sometimes for the worst reasons, such as his own personal gain. And yet—and this reflects the sorry state of diplomatic affairs in the United States—Kissinger's voice remains comparatively sensible.

If the 2004 elections bring pragmatists back to Washington, I'll give two cheers for realpolitik. Hip, hip... and then I'll immediately return to my critical ways. I'll dust off my

copy of *The Price of Power*. I'll rant and rave about how pragmatists in the Clinton mold are putting power over principles. In the meantime, though, I'll pine for Henry.

In his play *Galileo*, another old European, Bertolt Brecht, mourned the popular obsession for heroes in Germany of the 1930s. With minor changes, the couplet applies here as well:

Unhappy is the land that breeds a Henry Kissinger.
Unhappy is the land that needs a Henry Kissinger.