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### **The Triangular Diplomacy's Center of Gravity**

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The Cold War period has been thoroughly discussed among academics. Its importance lies with the delicacy of the decisions taken, as they demanded an immense amount of strategic talent in order to avoid complete nuclear catastrophe. The most important personality was the saint and devil of diplomacy who essentially marked the beginning of the end of the Cold War; Henry A. Kissinger. The first display of nuclear warfare in 1945, the instant and complete destruction of Japanese cities Hiroshima and Nagasaki by America was powerful enough to end traditional forms of warfare and start a new era. Weapons such as these were immediately perceived too dangerous and too easy to use and America did not want any other major power claiming them. However, the communist Soviet Union, governed by Joseph Stalin, declared shortly after his own nuclear weapon tests, a display of nuclear force immediately posing a threat to the short-celebrated victor. The immediate American response was the policy of Containment, aimed to prevent the spread of communism further, as it meant increased enemies of America with potentially nuclear weapons in their possession. Anything related to communism was perceived as dangerous and thus followed the period of the Red Scare which lasted even after Stalin's death, with Nikita

Khrushchev and later Leonid Brezhnev rising in Soviet leadership. During that period, China was also being transformed from an agricultural society to an industrial one, through the prism of communism presented by Marxist-Leninist leader Mao Zedong, a change that happened rapidly and with millions of deaths. America and the Soviet Union were frozen at the threat of a potential nuclear outbreak, a type of warfare fast and efficient enough that would decide a winner within a couple of well-placed nuclear bombings, while China was completely ignoring such threats and proceeded to expand their power. America had to conjure a high strategy plan and Kissinger would be the inventor of it. That plan, the triangular diplomacy, aimed at peace with the Soviet Union and communist China, as it would be the optimal field for an already economically developed America to stray the other two powers away from nuclear warfare. "Triangular" refers to the shape of three opposing state powers facing at each other. The way that was implemented was soothing diplomatic relations with communist China, in order to corner the Soviet Union in a two-against-one situation and force a diplomatic Cold War white flag on their part. The question that has perplexed academics since then is how did Kissinger assess threats with such precision and come up with a great strategic plan? In this paper it will be argued that, strategically speaking, the Soviet Union was perceived by Kissinger as a direct threat due to the nature of their leadership and therefore the archetype of Bolshevik leader became the center of gravity of Kissinger's strategy; at the same time, Mao Zedong's China was expected to be a potential ally eventually and was far from becoming a target for America. Even though the threat of Communism would have one believe that both communist powers should be threats to America's policies, the

Soviet Union leaders and the Chinese leader Mao Zedong had intrinsic differences stark enough in the eyes of an American statesman to be treated as separate entities to be analyzed, as it will be done in this paper, in said order.

Before Kissinger's Jungian-like methods are put under the microscope, three main concepts need to be explained separately: strategic Centers of Gravity, threat perception and Jungian archetypes. In military theory, Centers of Gravity are focal points that serve to hold a combatant's entire system or structure together and that draw power from a variety of sources and provide it with purpose and direction.<sup>1</sup> Centers of Gravity are therefore external from an individual's perception, as they objectively exist. Clearly identifying those gravitational centers has been consistently labeled by military theorists as a form of art, since perception inherently carries subjectivity with it.

Therefore the second concept to be defined is threat perception, which is simply what an individual or state identifies as a potential threat. Threat has been broadly defined as a verbal or physical.<sup>2</sup> Verbal threats usually take the form of conditional statements<sup>3</sup>, for example "If x, then y harm will be inflicted" and non-verbal threats are implied through non-verbal means. Two ways of identifying threat in international relations have been the non-psychological ones and the psychological ones. Non-psychological ones are the rationalist models, focused on information and the lack of it leaders

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<sup>1</sup> (J. Echevarria II 2002)

<sup>2</sup> (Stein 2013)

<sup>3</sup> (Stein 2013)

receive, possible bluffs and deception and credibility of information sources.

Psychological theories of threat perception focus on stimulation of emotions, fear or possible humiliation of the leaders involved.<sup>4</sup>

The aforementioned Jungian concepts used will be the archetypes, best described as “the inherited part of the psyche that structures recurrent patterns of psychological performance that are linked to the instincts. It is a hypothetical entity, unrepresentable in itself, and evident only through its manifestations; for example, in internal representations and outer behaviors that cluster around the basic and universal experiences of life”.<sup>5</sup> From a first glance, these three ideas may look unconnected, but in order to understand Kissinger’s thought process, their synthesis is deemed mandatory.

Kissinger has been outlining a uniquely intuitive method of predicting conflict which strips individual factors of any racial, ethnic or even cultural characteristics, down to their core conceptual identity: a political archetype, which as will be seen later, he also used it to assess threats during the Cold War. Scholars have characterized Kissinger and other Cold War strategists as “wizards”<sup>6</sup>, demonstrating how perplexing their brilliance was during that era. These wizards were trained to be the Cold War strategists that would combine modern analysis, psychology, game theory and traditional warfare theories.<sup>7</sup> Kissinger’s major insight was that conflict could be incited by definition of the leader’s roles involved. In what initially began as his

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<sup>4</sup> (Stein 2013)

<sup>5</sup> (Elphis 2000), 10.

<sup>6</sup> (Suri 2007), 139.

<sup>7</sup> (Suri 2007), 139.

doctoral dissertation, Kissinger's book "A World Restored: Metternich, Castlereagh and the Problems of Peace", offers a stunning explanation of the strain between Metternich and Alexander I, through the use of their temperaments. He writes and I quote:

"The statesman lives in his time; his test is the permanence of his structure under stress. The prophet lives in eternity which, by definition, has no temporal dimension; his test is inherent in his vision. The encounter between the two is always tragic, because the statesman must strive to reduce the prophet's vision to precise measures, while the prophet will judge the temporal structure by transcendental standards. To the statesman, the prophet represents a threat, because an assertion of absolute justice is a denial of nuance. To the prophet the statesman represents a revolt against reality, because the attempt to reduce justice to the attainable is a triumph of the contingent over the universal. To the statesman, negotiation is the essence of stability because it symbolizes the adjustment of conflicting claims and the recognition of legitimacy; to the prophet, it is the symbol of imperfection, of impure motives frustrating universal bliss. It was no accident that Alexander always felt misunderstood or that his colleagues always distrusted him. Their safety was a recognition of limits; his security a moment of transcendence. Castlereagh and Metternich, whatever their differences sought a world of intermediary nuance; Alexander one of immediate perfection."<sup>8</sup>

Kissinger here reads as a narrator explaining a conflict laid down by fate.

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<sup>8</sup> (Kissinger, A World Restored: Metternich, Castlereagh and the Problems of Peace 1957), 187.

He's taking neither the rational, calculative threat assessment route, neither the traditional psychological one. Instead, he begins by removing all characteristics that defined Metternich and Castlereagh, like nationality or cultural differences except their archetypal representation he bestows upon their political positions. In this Kissingerian top-down approach, any statesman would be deterministically bound to be in conflict with any prophet, as their visions, identities and methods of materializing them would never be aligned. A Jungian symbolic analysis, for example the old wise man, symbolizing the acquired wisdom which is the common inheritance of man<sup>9</sup>, can be paralleled with the idealistic vision of the prophet's desire for immediate perfection projected upon society Kissinger describes. The names of the book's protagonists arrive only by at the end of the narration, as they step into the shoes of the roles bestowed by Kissinger. In his later years, he would use similar concepts, perhaps more loosely and aggressively, as a means of liquidating the differences between America and the rest of the world.

Kissinger came up with the simple thought, that if two visions cannot be aligned, then the archetype of the enemy visionary should be altered until they do. In this power dynamic, the one who forces the change is the winner in diplomatic warfare. There have been scholars that claim that Kissinger deploys tools of diplomacy and their strategic use based on the opposing state's legitimacy or lack of there-of.<sup>10</sup> However, Kissinger had identified a completely different gravitational center, as the nature and legitimacy of states is directly related with the archetype of their leader. In

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<sup>9</sup> (Jung 1931), 336

<sup>10</sup> (Starr 1980), 488.

1957, the same year of publication as *A World Restored*, within the heart of the Cold War and the Soviet Union obviously posing a threat against America, Kissinger would publish his next book, "Nuclear Weapons and Foreign Policy". In his first pages, his use of words in the following two fragments implies this exact thought:

"...the possibilities of identifying ourselves with the aspirations of the rest of humanity, we are confronted by two revolutionary powers, the U.S.S.R. and Communist China, which pride themselves on their superior understanding of 'objective' forces and to which policies unrelated to a plausible possibility of employing force seem either hypocrisy or stupidity."<sup>11</sup>

Within the context of America's Wilsonian vision to be the beacon of peace, shedding democracy's light upon the world, Kissinger understood that this would be impossible without America having common identity and vision ground with the other two superpowers, Mao's China and the Soviet Republic. While America's vision was peaceful international relations, while seeking to find common ground with humanity itself, he describes communism during the Cold War era as an obstacle. This obstacle is created by the opposing vision these two superpowers were holding, which was warmongering in a singular manner. His narration reads that not only peace was perceived as stupid or hypocritical by these two, but so did any policy that didn't have to do with force, the implied communist means of achieving their vision. Within the next pages, Kissinger would present a viable solution, I quote:

"There is a measure of pathos in our continued efforts to discover

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<sup>11</sup> (Kissinger, *Nuclear Weapons and Foreign Policy* 1957), 6.

'reasonable' motives for the soviet leaders to cease being

Bolsheviks: the opportunities to develop the resources of their own country, the unlimited possibilities of nuclear energy, or the advantages of expanding international trade."<sup>12</sup>

He did not prompt for bribes nor business agreements and most definitely he disliked the use of force; Kissinger came to the conclusion that the only solution to the Cold War dilemma was for the soviet leaders to abandon the role that commanded their aspirations. Every idea he later presents is aimed towards this goal. Recognizing that the real threat is the Bolshevik leader archetype itself, regardless of who occupies the role, he points out the merits of a western democracy that demands a modern leader at the top of the political and organizational hierarchy. The bribe and checkmate Kissinger wanted to offer the Soviet Union was not material; it was the idea of the statesman.

The 50s and 60s Cold War battlefield of nuclear weapon manufacturing was initially perceived by America like a table of poker, where players of various physical capabilities sit to play, the cards in hand are the factor defining the winner and a round of the game can end within a couple of great guesses and proper moves. The players are the countries involved, their physical capabilities are their armies assembled (useless against nuclear weapons use), the cards in hand are the weapons of mass destruction constructed, left for guessing through information gathering and threat assessment. The game is played by predicting who's got the best hand and either playing into it with a better one or bailing out when the player did not have a response to their prediction. In such a context, America's military strength after the

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<sup>12</sup> (Kissinger, Nuclear Weapons and Foreign Policy 1957), 11.



Second World War was diminished. Kissinger was assessing that America is no longer invulnerable<sup>13</sup> and at the same time caught in the need for action. This was called the deterrence theory, where a previously inferior power could annihilate a bigger one through the use of nuclear weapons, but paradoxically enough that would be highly unlikely to happen, due to the very small benefit of it in comparison with the high cost of nuclear weapons manufacturing. But not everyone was willing to play the Cold War poker game, as the psychological freeze the military decision makers were undergoing in their pursuit of understanding said game was deemed too passive<sup>14</sup> for the most aggressive strategists. Such a strategist was Mao Zedong.

For Mao, instantly-winning nuclear displays of power backed by information warfare were not the only styles of playing the Cold War game and that is exactly why Kissinger and America did not prioritize him as a center of gravity. When Mao seized power in 1949, China looked like a reborn soldier with a stick, ready to seize the day in front of the two titans. In his foreign affairs, Mao appeared like the inherited will of the great Chinese military theorists Sun Tzu<sup>15</sup> and Zhuge Liang<sup>16</sup>. Back in the 1960s, scholars doubted the connection between Mao and Sun Tzu, as they claimed that data showing theory and practice are insufficient<sup>17</sup> however, an Indian Vice-

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<sup>13</sup> (Kissinger, *The Necessity for Choice* 1961), 2.

<sup>14</sup> (Kissinger, *On China* 2011), 133.

<sup>15</sup> Sun Tzu (544-496 BC), Chinese Military general, strategist and philosopher.

<sup>16</sup> Zhuge Liang (181-234 AD), Chinese politician, inventor and military theorist and strategist.

<sup>17</sup> (Boorman A. Scott 1964), 137.

Admiral researched Mao's strategies and concluded that the connection is clear. Both utilize, in the context of their era, deception as their core strategic element<sup>18</sup>. For example, in 1956, when Mao launched the Hundred Flowers Campaign, providing free speech to citizens of China, only to proceed massacring those who spoke up against his regime, he had managed to deceive his entire country for the sake of an ultimate goal. Deception is a tactic inherently incompatible with inflexible ideological spines. Between a Bolshevik leader and Mao, the later would be far more willing to use negotiations with America for the sake of a longer-view plan. Furthermore, Kissinger narrates in his book "On China" how Mao deployed Zhuge Liang's "empty city stratagem" during the Cold War era. When faced with a larger army, the only option the Chinese saw was to feign apathy, in order to psychologically force the enemy to think there must be hidden reinforcements and retreat.<sup>19</sup> This strategy, also founded on deception, was exactly what Mao did against America and Soviet Union, as he showed disinterest against potential nuclear destruction and a willingness to accept any kind of casualty for the sake of his goal. In a world where states were trying to learn poker, Mao was speaking of mirrored flowers and moons on the water<sup>20</sup>. Kissinger admits Mao was inspired by Chinese statecraft on the matter<sup>21</sup>, recognizing Mao as a statesman they could negotiate with, when

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<sup>18</sup> (Ghandhi 1965), 8.

<sup>19</sup> (Kissinger, On China 2011), 101.

<sup>20</sup> East Asian/Chinese proverb: *Mirror Flower, Water Moon*. It means that everything can be deceptive through the appropriate lens, just like how one can see the moon on the water or the flower in a mirror but not being able to touch it.

<sup>21</sup> (Kissinger, On China 2011), 101.

the time was right.

The foundations for Sino-American reconciliation were paved indirectly by Mao's economic sacrifices for the sake of his far-reaching view. From 1958 to 1962, Mao had launched the Great Leap Forward, which was essentially the transformation of China from an agricultural economy to an industrialized one, a radical change that caused tens of millions of deaths due to famine during the shift. In 1966, Mao launched his Cultural Revolution, which called the Chinese people to rid the country of traditional and capital elements. This was also an event that damaged the economy and caused millions of deaths. It is extremely easy to put blame on Mao for those deaths and the economic volatility. Indeed, economic growth was never stable, of zero relevance to a Soviet system designed to overthrow the bubbles and bursts of a capitalist market one and especially after the Cultural Revolution reached its zenith, it showed no signs of recovery.<sup>22</sup> In the eyes of an external observer, China would sooner or later have to let go of their closed economy and recurring waves of revolution. However, without any intention of excusing or supporting Mao in any way, he had all the room he needed for sacrifices. Between 1949 and 1980 China's huge rural population growth occurred, estimated to 390 million people increase and while cultivated land per head halved and GDP fluctuated as people were trying to adapt to the newly established industrial society<sup>23</sup>. In the eyes of Mao, China was producing human resources at a rate fast enough to push for radical changes enough to change a China previously left behind in progress into a modern power. Even during the first real economic

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<sup>22</sup> (Walder 2015), 322.

<sup>23</sup> (Prybyla 1984), 49.

stagnation, the industrial structures had already been established and the economy would surely emerge from its swamp again. The Soviet Union was deploying every possible means of propaganda against him, due to their ideological differences. That's when Mao implied that he was open to Sino-American negotiations, as the next big step forward and Kissinger would be exactly where he needed to be.

Therefore, Kissinger deployed his triangular policy during the end of the 60s after observing the two powers he was struggling to come at peaceful negotiations with; one Soviet Union inherently Bolshevik, stubborn and reluctant to stray away from their ideological grounds, and one Maoist China, using Communism not as a core ideological concept but as a tool for progress and excuse for sacrifices. Maoist China was the only one of the two America's opposing powers that Kissinger could initiate negotiations. The move made on this chessboard smoothed Sino-American relations and aimed at cornering and eradicating the Bolshevik leader archetype of the Soviet Union. Although history had Kissinger leaving office at 1977, the Soviet Union would start to slowly succumb to the exact temptations of the Western economy Kissinger wanted them to, with their eventual collapse at 1991. As the academia describes Kissinger as a "wizard", it is proposed that the matter is analyzed through the lens of strategy, instead of arbitrary non-insights, with the tools of psychology and economics. Henry Kissinger had managed to become the prophet of the Soviet Union's demise two decades before it happened and such feats are rarely achieved through the use of lucky hat tricks.

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