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Citation

Assem, A. van den. (2000). The Perseverance of Beliefs: the Reaction of Kissinger and Brezinski to the End of the Cold War. *Acta Politica*, 35: 2000(2), 169-195. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/3450693>

Version: Publisher's Version

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Downloaded from: <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/3450693>

Note: To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

2(4), pp. 302-321.

Wood, Pia Christina (1997), 'French political party opposition to European integration, 1981-1996: myth or reality?', in: Alan W. Cafruny and Carl Lankowski (eds.), *Europe's Ambiguous Unity: Conflict and Consensus in the Post-Maastricht Era*. Boulder: Lynne Rienner.

The Perseverance of Beliefs: the Reaction of Kissinger and Brzezinski to the End of the Cold War

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Abstract

The end of the cold war has affected, in one way or another, the vision of security experts. The former so-called 'cold-warriors', or defence-conservative security experts, are especially likely to feel uncomfortable in the new situation. The central question of this paper is: how and to what extent has the end of the cold war affected the beliefs of the defence-conservative security experts? The principle aim of this study is to illuminate the reactions of these strategic thinkers and to understand how the end of the cold war has affected their ideas and belief systems. A theoretical framework is presented with which it is possible to interpret, in a systematic manner, the way in which security experts deal with and adapt to the new and challenging situation. The framework is based on the belief system approach. Furthermore, the results of an in-depth study of the reactions of two well-known security experts – Henry Kissinger and Zbigniew Brzezinski – will be presented. Special attention will be paid to the way in which these experts resolve dissonance.

1 Introduction

More than ten years ago the cold war came to a close with the break-up of the Soviet Union and the transformation of Central and Eastern Europe. This major event in world history has had profound impact on the strategic interests of the United States – the only superpower left. Reborn hope for a new world order and renewed concern about regional conflicts and inter-ethnic strife have pressured the American foreign policy elite to rethink the means and objectives of American strategy. As much remains uncertain, the debate about strategic adjustment is still going on (Katzenstein 1996; Trubowitz et al. 1999). Within this debate, ideas and beliefs play an important role, as they help to shape political discourse, institutions and, in the end, foreign policy choices (Trubowitz & Rhodes 1999). "Ideas," argue Goldstein and Keohane (1993: 12), "help to order the world [and] shape agendas, which can profoundly shape outcomes." These ideas can be new ones, but it is also conceivable that beliefs of national security experts have hardly changed in

the last decade (Van den Assem 1991, 1998).

Beliefs, according to Smith (1988), are expected to be robust as the mind is more a belief-seeking than a fact-seeking mechanism. The work of some well-known writers in the field suggests that most experts would still like to demonstrate that the end of the cold war did not seriously contradict their basic assumptions about how the world works (Brown 1991). The perseverance of cold war belief systems, or regressive mindsets, as Booth (1990) called them, can have far-reaching consequences for the contemporary debate. It is thus interesting to know whether and how the ideas of so-called 'cold-warriors', or defence-conservative security experts, have changed as a result of the end of the cold war: the insight in dominant beliefs and intellectual developments forms an important element in the understanding of the process of strategic adjustment (De Lange 1991a/b; Trubowitz & Rhodes 1999; Walker et al. 1999). The central question of this article, therefore, is: how and to what extent has the end of the cold war affected the beliefs of defence-conservative security experts?

Elaborating on the fears of Booth (1990), this article will present the results of an in-depth study that has been made of the ideas and reactions of two of the 'cold-warriors': Henry Kissinger and Zbigniew Brzezinski (Van den Assem 1998). The principle aim of the exercise is to illuminate the reactions of these strategic thinkers and thus to understand the way in which the end of the cold war has affected their ideas and belief systems. For that purpose, a model will be developed with which the ideas and reactions of these strategists will be analysed. The model will be based on insights from the belief system and consistency literature. Having outlined the approach, the beliefs of the two strategists, their reaction to the end of the cold war and, finally, the consequences of that event for their belief system will be analysed.

2 The study of belief systems: perseverance and change

2.1 The structure of beliefs

Within the study of international relations, most scholars have to admit that structural theory remains, in the words of Herrmann and Fischerkeller (1995: 415), "sufficiently indeterminate." Though power and other situational factors set limits on the policy options of leaders, it seldom reduces the number of options to a single one. Furthermore, the theory does not help to understand how people estimate the situation. Therefore, it is not enough to assume that actors perceive the situation as a researcher anticipated. Instead, he has to explore the mental constructions or belief systems empirically (Herrmann & Fischerkeller 1995). This explains why there is still a growing scholarly interest

in the belief system approach (Walker et al. 1998, 1999). People are expected to simplify their world, as the incoming information is far too complex and extensive to comprehend – especially within the field of international politics (Axelrod 1973; Herrmann & Fischerkeller 1995; Tetlock & McQuire 1986). Information processing, however, is not an arbitrary process. People possess beliefs, which represent the information an individual has about himself and about his social and non-social environment, that will make successful interaction with the outside world possible (Ajzen 1995; Smith 1988; Voss & Dorsey 1992). These beliefs help the individual to select and interpret incoming information. For this reason, much research focuses on the nature of the filtering devices through which information concerning the environment is received, as well as on the extent to which individual beliefs lead to a particular representation of information and, subsequently, to a particular form of behaviour.

Taken together, beliefs perform two interrelated functions. In an often-quoted description of Holsti (1962: 544, cited in Smith 1988), they function as:

a set of lenses through which information concerning the physical and social environment is received. It orients the individual to his environment, defining it for him and identifying for him its salient characteristics [...] [It also] has the function of the establishment of goals and the ordering of preferences.

Furthermore, political psychologists tend to consider them not as an unorganized and chaotic collection of beliefs, but rather as a belief system: a hierarchically structured entity of mutually connected beliefs (Larson 1994). Within such a system, beliefs can be scaled on the basis of a centre-periphery basis. The beliefs in the centre are more stable and are less likely to change. Moreover, they exert a certain influence on the beliefs outside the centre (Bem 1970; Larson 1994). Therefore, social psychologists initially expected belief systems to be internally coherent and stable over time. However, although empirical research has supported these expectations for some leaders, it has not done so for all of them (Walker & Falkowski 1984; Walker et al. 1998). Therefore, Walker et al. (1998), argue that a theoretical stance more consistent with these mixed results is to conceptualize a belief system as a set for an alternative state of mind. This means that incoherence among beliefs or compartmentalization of different ideas is possible. It also means that people are capable of learning – that is changing their beliefs over time.

Thus, in addition to a hierarchical structure, the elements of a belief system may also reflect other organizational properties: beliefs – or schemas as they are sometimes called – are not as organized as the belief system approach suggests (Conover & Feldman 1984; Fiske & Taylor 1991). However, this does not mean that they are isolated; they are usually linked in a network (Conover & Feldman 1984; Larson 1994; Taylor & Crocker 1981). Such a network arises

during the development of an individual as different beliefs or schemas unite in a larger entity (Fiske & Taylor 1991; Fiske & Morling 1995). This development explains the expert-novice differences in the organization of knowledge that Converse (1964) demonstrated in his well-known research. The relevant knowledge of an expert is much more clustered and better organized than that of a novice (Chase & Simon 1973; Conover & Feldman 1984; Larson 1994). Thus, as Conover and Feldman (1984: 98) argue, "the schema concept is by no means incompatible with those previously used [...] [Therefore] an individual's more abstract or general schemas would be analogous to what others have referred to as a 'core belief system'."

These observations fit in with Steinbruner's (1974) approach to the cognitive dimensions of political and organizational phenomena; especially his dichotomy of people with one cognitive structure – theoretical thinkers – versus people with more than one structure – uncommitted thinkers (Van den Assem 1998). This dichotomy is analogous with the doubts of Walker et al. (1998) mentioned above and will therefore be used as an organizational principle. A belief system can thus be seen as an abstract and complex schema of an expert, that is, however, not necessarily organized in one coherent structure (Larson 1994).

2.2 Belief systems and challenging information

Until the 1980s the above mentioned approach assumed that information processing was influenced more by the belief system than by incoming information. Nowadays, social psychologists are assuming that the challenging information can have more impact, as a strongly held belief cannot stand up to unambiguously dissonant information (Fiske & Taylor 1991). On the other hand, as Larson (1994: 25) argues, "evidence which irrefutably contradicts [beliefs] is highly rare in international relations." Thus, in the field of international relations beliefs can have great impact on the perception and interpretation of information (Herrmann & Fischerkeller 1995; Walker et al. 1998, 1999).

Moreover, this approach suggests that the rules underpinning a belief system have their own logic. In the late 1950s, Festinger (1957), Heider (1958), Abelson (1959, 1968) and others, assumed that the strive to achieve cognitive consistency forms the heart of those rules; this is an assumption that still generates research studies (Cooper 1995a/b). Distortion of cognitive unity motivates people to restore the balance. People thus favour a balanced and consistent belief system and are motivated to avoid, reduce or undo cognitive dissonance. The central beliefs, in particular, are unlikely to change when confronted with challenging information: an alteration to those 'master beliefs'

as Holsti (1977a/b) called them, would necessarily lead to changes in many other associated beliefs.

According to Abelson (1959), people have different mechanisms at their disposal to deal with challenging information: denial, bolstering, differentiation and transcendence. The first and most simple way of reducing consistency is denial: just deny the existence or validity of the information that creates dissonance. Bolstering, the second technique that he mentions, involves adding consistent elements to an unbalanced relationship in order to overpower the inconsistency. Denial and bolstering both have the advantage of not changing the belief system. The third mechanism, differentiation, does lead to a small change, as the individual divides a particular cognitive element into two parts, one consistent and the other inconsistent, thus restoring the balance. A special case of differentiation is adding a dissonant belief to the system without changing it, for instance, the "exception that proves the rule" (Larson 1994; Weber & Crocker 1983). In the same vein, people may use counterfactual reasoning in order to cope with dissonant information (Olson 1996; Tetlock & Belkin 1996). By treating information as if it is true, but knowing it is not true, they can deal with it and comment on it without changing their beliefs. Transcendence, lastly, is more or less the opposite of differentiation. It involves the creation of a new belief, using the elements of the dissonant relationship. This mechanism is the most complex form of dissonance reduction and shall, therefore, not be employed frequently. These four mechanisms together form a useful tool for gaining insight into the way people cope with dissonant information (Bem 1970; Jervis 1976; Little 1988; Milburn 1991).

When these mechanisms cannot cope with challenging information, change is likely to occur. The theoretical thinker, however, has a belief system that is strongly resistant to change (Steinbruner 1974: 131-5). The beliefs are likely to change only when the flow of challenging information becomes too overwhelming to ignore. When this happens, a theoretical thinker will first try to alter the less central beliefs, since it is supported by the least information and tied to the fewest other beliefs (Larson 1994). He may also form new ideas, inferences and perceptions at lower levels of generality. In both cases, however, the new beliefs may not challenge the central beliefs. When contradiction is unavoidable, it is possible that small changes will have major repercussions.

The uncommitted thinker, on the other hand, does not have a singular structure (Steinbruner 1974: 128-31; Shimko 1991; Stein 1994). He can be regarded as an individual with more than one belief structure. Within each structure, there is a certain amount of stability and coherence, but together the structures are inconsistent. The pressure of inconsistency produces an oscillation between the two structures, each of which represents a psychologically coherent and consistent segment of the overall problem. The

uncommitted thinker, therefore, adopts at different times different belief patterns for the same problem. In the wake of challenging information, this type of thinker does preserve his belief system, but uses the other belief pattern to comprehend the new situation.

2.3 Research Method

This study will analyse the work of two well-known security experts, namely Kissinger and Brzezinski. The reason for this choice can be found in the aim of this research that prescribes detailed knowledge of how the end of the cold war affected the ideas of defence-conservative security experts.¹ The choice is also limited to those experts who have written extensively before, during and since this event. Moreover, a more plausible assessment of the impact of the belief system is likely when two experts are compared who, ideally, are matched in every important respect and differ only in their belief system (George 1969).

After screening several security experts, it emerged that Kissinger and Brzezinski match almost ideally. Their academic and political careers, their anti-Communist ideological stance and their courses of life are remarkably similar. Both were born in Europe in the 1920s, but were forced to flee to the other side of the Atlantic Ocean: Kissinger fled from the Nazis and Brzezinski from the Communists. Both were educated in North America - Kissinger in the United States, Brzezinski in Canada, and both obtained their doctorate at Harvard. They both served as National Security Advisors - Kissinger under Nixon and Brzezinski under Carter, though only Kissinger became Secretary of State. Before, during and since ending their political careers, they have both written extensively about foreign policy and security issues. However, their belief systems and belief system structures differed (Van den Assem 1998).

The analysis of their work will cover three different periods. In the first place, their writings before the end of the cold war will be analysed to establish their belief systems before the adaptation process begins. Subsequently, their writings during the process of transformation will be analysed. This process started in 1987, when, after Gorbachev's call for glasnost and political reform, most scholars recognized that 'reform is in the air' and ended in 1990 when European and American leaders closed the cold war during the CSCE summit meeting in Paris with a conventional arms agreement. This information can give insight into the question how these strategists reacted to the end of the cold war. Finally, their writings since the cold war will be analysed in order to establish to what extent this event affected their belief systems.

To gain these insights, this study uses another well-established body of research on the psychological basis of these processes, namely the operational code analysis, because it is a powerful tool in analysing the belief systems of

national security experts (George 1969, 1979a/b; Heradstveit 1979; Holsti 1977a/b, 1982; Walker et al. 1998, 1999). Its most important characteristic is its coherent, organized structure. Changes in beliefs logically imply further changes in related elements. Thus, the principle of cognitive consistency is the dominant inference pattern.

Table 1 The adapted operational code

<i>Philosophical Questions</i>	
1	Essential nature of international politics
a	What is the essential nature of international relations?
b	What rules, laws and forces control international politics?
c	What is the essential nature of contemporary international politics?
2	Image of the opponent
a	What are the goals of the opponent's foreign policy?
b	What is the motivation of this policy?
c	What kind of strategy and tactics are being used?
d	How does the opponent's political system work?
e	What is the opponent's position of power?
3	Historical consciousness
a	What role does man play in history?
b	To what extent is man able to control or master history?
c	In what sense and to what extent is the political future predictable?
<i>Instrumental Questions</i>	
4	Instrumental beliefs
a	What is the best approach for selecting goals or objectives for political action?
b	How are different means of power related to each other?
c	What is the utility and role of diplomacy?
d	What is the utility and role of military force?
5	Strategic Policy
a	What is the utility and role of different means combined for advancing one's interests?

A slightly adapted version of the operational code is used to deduce the beliefs of the security experts from their work (see Table 1). Since they are scholars who use abstract theories and models to comprehend the international system, more attention is paid to the first philosophical belief in George's operational code - the essential nature of international politics and the image of the opponent - while the other philosophical questions are grouped in one category, namely historical consciousness (Sjöblom 1982; Van den Assem 1998; Van den Assem & Van Dooren 2000). For the same reason, the instrumental questions in this research pay more attention to strategic matters than George's

original operational code construct. In summary, the strategists' philosophical and instrumental beliefs represent their views on strategy and politics.

In this study, the five categories of the adapted operational code are used as a coding scheme in order to deduce the belief system of a security expert (Shimko 1992). Since it is not possible to measure the beliefs in a direct way, they have to be determined by documentary evidence that is based on primary sources – the writings of the strategists themselves. It is not necessary to collect private correspondence as the writings of Kissinger and Brzezinski offer a rich insight into their views about security issues. The operational codes are, therefore, ascertained by examining their scholarly writings – mainly books and articles – on the assumption that they present their most carefully considered views (Andrianopoulos 1991). This study, therefore, is based on the more important written work of these strategists, from when they started until 1996, which is well after the end of the cold war (Van den Assem 1998).

A qualitative content analysis technique is applied. According to Shimko (1992: 359) this is “a somewhat impressionistic, interpretive, and nuanced reading of the subjects' comments”. Though this technique is accused of being relatively subjective and unsystematic, it does have advantages (Walker et al. 1998). In this study, it has been used because it coheres with the research aim. Strategists can be very subtle and ingenious in their dealings with challenging information and are therefore hard to classify in a rigorous coding scheme. Moreover, they are likely to develop their own style of coping with dissonance. The analysis of their arguments usually requires a nuanced and interpretive evaluation. To compensate the disadvantage of this method, a comprehensive system of references has been used. This system strengthens the reliability and the reproducibility of the findings.

There are, however, problems in using the operational code for understanding and explaining the reactions of security experts until the end of the cold war. Knowledge of beliefs can help, but is not a substitute for analysis of specific other pressures on the strategists. Their social position, work, personal situation, etcetera, is also likely to affect their reactions. Moreover, human creativity in structuring alternatives does generate problems for the belief system and consistency approach. A scholar can explain why an actor perceives a situation in a certain manner and why he reacted to this in the way he did. On the other hand, the definition of options available to an individual when confronted with challenging information is a human activity. Therefore, it is not possible to know in advance whether people will develop new alternatives. The way in which Brzezinski was using both his belief system structures to deal with the end of the cold war, for instance, is in retrospect explicable from a cognitive point of view, but could not have been forecast by the same approach. Finally, this approach presupposes that beliefs are important and therefore runs the risk of taking the experts at their word.

Nevertheless, beliefs are still presumed to be autonomous and to matter in security issues (Walker et al. 1999). Insight into belief systems does not provide a simple solution to explanation and prediction, but it can help to understand and identify the ways in which strategists perceive new situations, deal with challenging information and approach the task of making an assessment of different policy options. By enhancing our understanding of the impact of beliefs on the reaction of these strategists, this study would both facilitate our insight into the politics of strategic adjustment and address the fears of Booth.

3 Research findings

This paragraph will present the results of an in-depth study of Kissinger and Brzezinski.² Each security expert will be dealt with in a short section that covers his belief system before the end of the cold war, his reaction to the challenging information during the turbulent period of 1987-90, and, finally, the consequences for his beliefs after 1990.

3.1 Henry Kissinger: the theoretical thinker

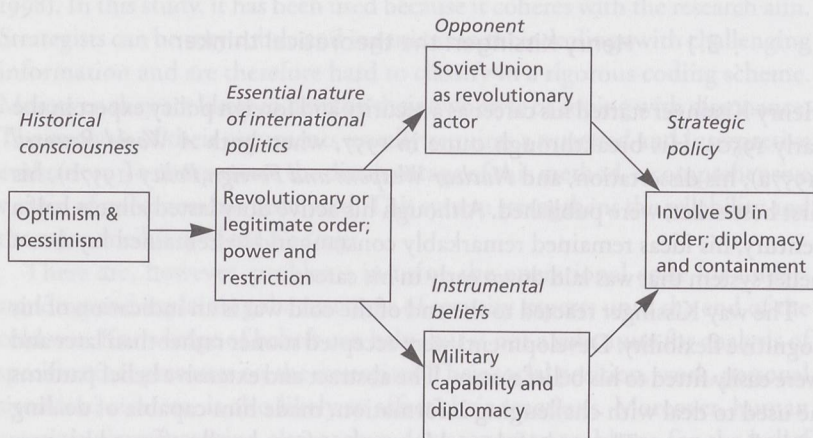
Henry Kissinger started his career as a security and foreign policy expert in the early 1950s. His breakthrough came in 1957, when both *A World Restored* (1957a), his dissertation, and *Nuclear Weapons and Foreign Policy* (1957b), his first best-seller, were published. Although his active duty lasted almost half a century, his ideas remained remarkably constant and he remained loyal to a belief system that was laid down early in his career.

The way Kissinger reacted to the end of the cold war is an indication of his cognitive flexibility. Developments were accepted sooner rather than later and were easily fitted to his belief system. The abstract and extensive belief patterns he used to deal with challenging information, made him capable of dealing with dissonance. The end of the cold war, therefore, hardly affected his core belief system. He regarded the event as the closure of an abnormal historical period and a return to an age – one much admired by him – of 19th century diplomacy and power politics. His latest academic work, *Diplomacy* (1994a), can thus be seen as both a sequel and a return to his dissertation.

Kissinger's belief system during the cold war consisted of a network of mutually connected beliefs. His ideas about the essential nature of international politics, the image of the opponent as well as his historical consciousness formed a remarkably coherent unity and clearly affected his instrumental beliefs and strategic vision (see Figure 1).

Within this system, his historical consciousness stood out as an important feature. Especially in his earlier work, Kissinger paid attention to history and its relation with humankind. A dualism between pessimism and optimism characterized these ideas. On the one hand, he regarded history as an endless and aimless process without deeper meaning: "it is incorrect to think of political evolution as some kind of fulfilment towards which all roads converge" (1961: 297). "Whatever meaning history has," he stated in 1965, "is derived from the convictions and purpose of the generation which shapes it" (1965: 251). From the work of Spengler he learned that man and state are both mortal and thus that the struggle for survival is the most important value (1957a: 66). Dickson, a scholar who wrote extensively about Kissinger's historical ideas, concluded therefore that he can be considered "fundamentally pessimistic, even fatalistic" (Dickson 1978: 72). Kissinger himself once said to the Italian journalist Fallaci: "In a sense, however, I am a fatalist. I believe in fate" (cited in Stoessinger 1976: 19).

Figure 1 Kissinger's belief system during the cold war



On the other hand, Kissinger was an optimist, who believed in man's ability to change and create reality (1961: 357). A wise statesman could change and create reality, since "fate can be shaped by human faith and courage" (1981: 97; cf. 1961: 287-339; 1979: 55). In a newspaper, he once stated that as "an historian one has to live with a sense of the inevitability of tragedy. As a statesman, one has to act on the assumption that problems must be solved" (cited in Starr 1984: 61; cf. Kissinger 1979: 54-55). Thus, besides a pessimistic academic, Kissinger was also an optimistic policy-maker who struggled against historical forces (Kautsky 1982: 227).

Kissinger's pessimism found expression in his dark world-view where the forces of chaos and order were fighting their eternal battle. The essential nature of international politics was shaped by the "uneasy tension between the conserving and the destructive tendencies inherent in any body social" (1957a: 197). Thus sovereign states were responsible for their own survival and should, therefore, strive for order as the most important aim (1957b: 318; 1974: 253-68; 1981: 79). Without order, there would only be chaos. He once told his friend and Kissinger-biographer Stoessinger (1976: 14) that "[i]f I had to choose between justice and disorder, on the one hand, and injustice and order, on the other, I would always choose the latter." Nevertheless, Kissinger believed that states were able to create a stable order that would not be tormented by major war, because "the interests of nations of the world are, though different, complementary" (1981: 50; cf. 1957a; 1968).

From this, Kissinger deduced that the international state system could be characterized either as a revolutionary order or as a stable order (1957a/b; 1961; 1968; 1974; 1979; 1981). A stable or legitimate order – Kissinger used both terms interchangeably – is "distinguished by not pressing the quest for security to its limits, by its willingness to find safety in a combination of physical safeguards and mutual trust" (1957b: 318; cf. 1957a: 1-6; 1974: 259; 177: 235). A revolutionary order, conversely, lacks limitations on means and ends, which caused war to become total. "The logic of war," he wrote (1957a: 138), "is power, and power has no inherent limit. The logic of peace is proportion and proportion implies limitation." This order is usually caused by an attempt of a revolutionary power to overthrow an existing order; an attempt that is often driven by domestic factors (1957a: 3, 328; 1974: 12, 27-44). By using both power and diplomacy, Kissinger thought that it would be possible to manoeuvre such a power within the system thereby creating a stable order: "aggression [must be] too costly to attempt and peace too tempting to reject" (1977: 428; cf. 1974: 143, 185).

Kissinger used this framework to describe and understand the international political situation. He observed that the world was in a revolutionary state because of the rise of the Soviet Union as a revolutionary power after World War II (1957b). In this period the political differences between East and West started to dominate the international arena. The military and technological developments that emerged at the same time, subsequently froze this struggle in a cold war (1974: 14, 46, 91, 267; 1977: 143-44; 1979: 60-68, 115). This situation was worsened by the decolonization, which caused the international environment to be in turmoil "because its essential elements [were] all in flux simultaneously" (1974: 52; cf. 1957b: 5-7; 1974: 15, 52-56; 1979: 66-69; 1981: 74; 1985: 68).

In this situation, Kissinger considered the balance of power and the national interest as the most important foreign policy guides: moral values or ideology should not interfere with them. Above all, the survival of the state should be

guaranteed: both surrender and annihilation should be avoided (1974: 59; 1982: 23). This required an extensive military capability that was flexible enough to avoid the paralysing effect of nuclear war with the help of a war-fighting strategy (1957b: 11, 174-202; 1961: 75-95; 1977: 160; 1982a: 1157-76; 1982b: 23). Military capability alone, however, was not enough, as it would result in a policy that "seeks empire or hegemony for oneself" (1981: 115). Diplomacy was necessary too, since it could avoid accidents and, more importantly, could manoeuvre the Soviet Union in the prevailing order. He therefore advised a policy of containment that was supplemented with diplomatic actions (1977: 173; 1979: 61-62; 1982a: 238; 1985: 16-18).

Kissinger's reaction to the end of the cold war – as a columnist and political commentator, Kissinger could keep a close track of developments within the Soviet Union in the period 1987-90. Moreover, he sometimes met the leading figures Reagan and Gorbachev. His comments were often dominated by the thought that the West should not miss the historical opportunity by lack of understanding, too much enthusiasm or indolence: "The problem is not [Gorbachev's] challenge but the Western response" (1988e). The historical process would result in chaos and anarchy if it was not be controlled by sensible statesmanship.

After a visit to Moscow in 1987, Kissinger came to the conclusion that "[r]eform is in the air," as the new leadership "displays a vigor, dynamism and flexibility inconceivable 10 years ago" (1987a: 10). He was, however, not convinced that this should alter "how we conduct our relations with the Soviet Union" (1988c: 903; cf. 1988b: 205). Thus, his first reaction to the developments was to deny that they would have a positive impact on the East-West relationship. He did not deny the developments as such, but he trivialized their meaning and importance. He claimed, for instance, that glasnost and perestroika should not be seen as a new start for democracy, but should be considered as a policy to strengthen the economy and hence "to make the Soviet Union more powerful" (1987a: 10; cf. 1988a). He warned, therefore "the democracies will in the long run be less secure" (1987a: 11). He also discredited Gorbachev, describing him as a cunning and powerful leader who was able to win the rat race for the highest position within the CPSU (1987d: 41). Gorbachev's peace proposals should also be understood as a cunning trick to separate "America from its European allies" (1987c: 19-20; cf. 1987d: 36; 1988b: 207). Above all, he wrote that "the democracies are in danger of succumbing to self-induced emotional blackmail" (1987a: 13; cf. 1987b: 5; 1988a; 1988c: 904).

Kissinger not only used denial as a mechanism to reduce dissonance, but bolstering as well. He maintained, for example, that changes would not have far-reaching implications, as "Communist leaders have always opted for repression. [...] The Soviet Union is a totalitarian state today and it will be a

totalitarian state even after the reforms are completed" (1987a: 11; cf. 1988b: 204). Gorbachev could, according to Kissinger, never challenge the important bureaucratic actors. He would either change his policies or be replaced (1987d: 41; 1988c: 903). Moreover, Gorbachev's new policy could also be meant to appease his powerful neighbours, for example, China, Japan and India (1987d: 41; 1988a; 1988b: 208).

In the winter of 1988-89 Kissinger accepted that the developments did change the balance of power in favour of the West, though he still remained wary of Gorbachev's policies: "Once the image of a hostile Soviet Union has been destroyed, American post-war foreign policy will disintegrate and America will be expelled from Eurasia" (1988d: cf. 1989b: 19). Furthermore, he denied the importance of the cease-fire in Afghanistan, as "it would perpetuate Communist control" (1988e), and he dismissed Gorbachev's proposal for unilateral arms-reduction, as "nonsense" (1988e).

He did, however, integrate the developments within his belief system by using counterfactual reasoning (differentiation). In an academic speculation, he tried to understand what would happen if Gorbachev did mean what he said. It would, he feared, result in an explosive situation in Eastern Europe, because there were not enough Russian troops to suppress any revolt that would be likely to occur (1988d/e). Thus, he strongly urged for a political dialogue between Moscow and Washington, otherwise the two sides would be "working themselves [...] into a classical European crisis of the kind that produced World War I" (1988d; cf. 1988e; 1989a). Based on the historical current, such a dialogue would finally manoeuvre the Soviet Union into the prevailing order. In the period 1989-1990, Kissinger remained cautious, but, with the help of this speculation, he was able to accept the end of the cold war. His beliefs, however, did not change much, as there was still a Soviet threat to reckon with. The Soviet Union would either recover from the crisis and remain a revolutionary power, or head for a disaster that could lead to another world war.

The effects of the end of the cold war on Kissinger's belief system – The cold war did not end the way Kissinger had foreseen. The Soviet Union was not drawn into a stable order by a wise statesman, as Kissinger had always expected, it simply collapsed. Moreover, this happened after the United States had pursued a tough, ideological inspired doctrine, instead of a policy of linkage and containment. In other words, he had to explain why, in his eyes, the statesman Nixon failed and the crusaders Reagan succeeded.

In *Diplomacy* (1994a), Kissinger walked the tightrope to reconcile these contradictions. Nixon – and thus Kissinger himself – failed, because he underestimated the importance of moral values. Kissinger admitted that a "country with America's idealistic tradition cannot base its policy on the balance of power as the sole criterion for a new world order" (1994a: 833). He

therefore spoke highly of Reagan, who pursued an offensive anti-Soviet policy on both geostrategic and ideological grounds (1994a: 772). This policy gave Russia the final blow, as “America had built a position of strength and the Soviet Union was crumbling from within” (1994a: 792; cf. 1994b: 113-130). Both his admiration for Reagan and the importance he attached to idealism, challenged his beliefs. However, he solved the dissonance by presenting Reagan as a statesman in disguise: Reagan’s moralistic stance led him to pursue a realistic balance of power policy (1994a: 769-774). By depicting Reagan as a statesman, Kissinger restored the balance within his belief system.

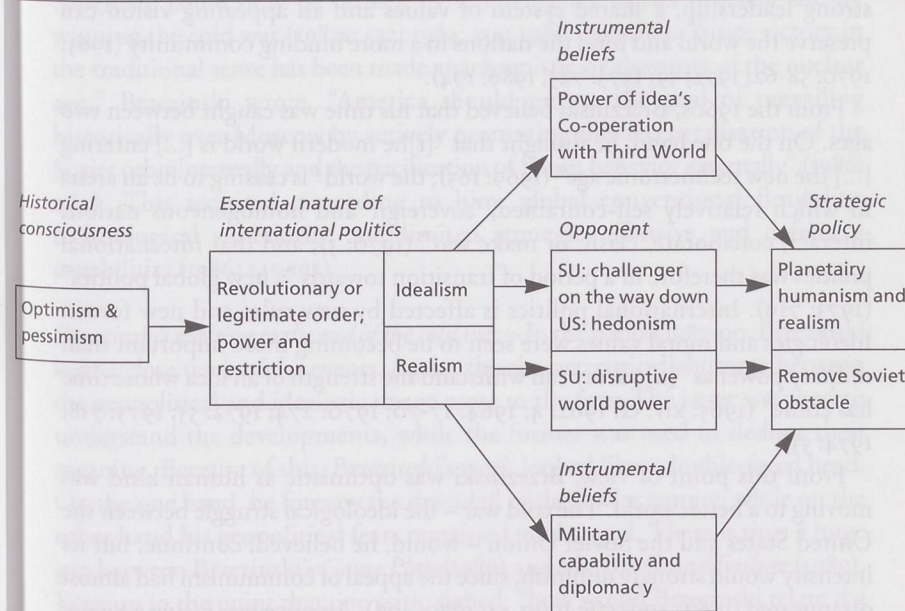
This does not, however, resolve a core dilemma, namely the reconciliation of realistic and idealistic approaches to foreign policy. In fact, Kissinger did not resolve this dilemma, but instead ascribed it to the special character of the cold war: “The objective of moral opposition had merged with the geopolitical task of resisting Soviet expansionism” (1994a: 804). This, however, was a feature of the cold war, and disappeared once the war was over. The West should, therefore, forget this lesson, because “[v]ictory in the Cold War has propelled America into a world which bears many similarities to the European state system of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries” (1994a: 805; cf. 1992a/c). In other words, he admitted his own bias, but he did not change his belief system. With a sigh of relief, Kissinger observed that his beliefs were still valid and that history finally returned to its pre-cold war stance (1992a:7; 1992c: 671).

For Kissinger therefore, the end of the cold war meant, in particular, a change of his beliefs concerning the nature of contemporary international politics, since the bipolar structure was replaced by a multi-power system that resembled the European order in the 19th century. Russia ceased to be the ideologically driven revolutionary power, but is not, according to him, a legitimate, status quo minded ally either (1992a: 87; 1992b; 1993b; 1994a: 786). The Russian threat is still looming above Europe, because “Russia will always be essential to world order and [...] a potential menace to it” (1994a: 25; cf. 1992a: 10, 45). The core of Kissinger’s beliefs – his historical consciousness and his ideas about the essential nature of international politics – did not change, while his instrumental beliefs changed, but only very little. A large and flexible military capability, diplomacy and the linkage between both, are still the instruments of an American statesman, who would build a stable order based on the principles of the balance of power and working hard to attach potential revolutionary powers firmly to that order (1992a: 172; 1992c; 1993a/b; 1994a: 166-167, 822-832; 1995: 102-103). In sum, Kissinger’s belief system hardly changed in reaction to the end of the cold war.

3.2 Zbigniew Brzezinski: the uncommitted thinker

In his long career as academic and policy advisor, Brzezinski has been less loyal to his beliefs than Kissinger. His wish to explain unexpected developments and his susceptibility to trends appear to be more important than the motivation to be consistent. Brzezinski’s work has become a melting pot of various, sometimes divergent, concepts, approaches and assumptions. Hidden behind this melting pot, though, lies an abstract belief system, which consists of two different structures: one realistic and one idealistic. Each is based on a distinguishing historical period, which affects human life. Throughout Brzezinski’s work an oscillation between these two is visible. These two structures made it easy for him to react to the end of the cold war. By using the two structures at the same time, he could combine new developments and old certainties. The end of the cold war, therefore, hardly affected Brzezinski’s belief system. In fact, he returned to earlier to work, namely *Between Two Ages* (1970) and *Game Plan* (1986).

Figure 2 Brzezinski’s belief system during the cold war



Brzezinski's belief system during the cold war – Unlike Kissinger, Brzezinski did not possess a comprehensive and consistent singular structure of beliefs (see Figure 2). He, instead, can be regarded as an uncommitted thinker, as he possesses two structures. Within each structure there is a certain amount of

stability and coherence, but together they are inconsistent. The pressure of inconsistency produces an oscillation between them. Brzezinski adopts different belief patterns at different times. In the 1960s and 1980s the realistic structure dominated, while in the 1970s his idealistic structure came to the fore.

In spite of this inconstancy, Brzezinski's world-view did have two constant beliefs, which together formed the core of his belief system. In the first place, he took, as he wrote in 1986, "the reality of evil in human condition" for granted (1988a: 124; cf. 1970: 275). Without a sense of values and a strong political or social control, man's inherent aggressiveness would lead to a permanent state of war. In the second place, Brzezinski believed in an historical development to a better world as "all human history clearly indicates progress" (1970: 296; cf. 1964: 419-436; 1967: ix, 485-512). To a certain extent, therefore, history can be predicted and controlled by man (1965: 132-175; 1972: 18-35; 186: 141-144). Though the shape of the future cannot be reduced to a neat plan, he wrote, "the future can and must be planned" (1970: 256). The interaction between these two beliefs has led to a repetitive pattern in the writings of Brzezinski; when the inevitable historical developments are not controlled by man, his inherent aggressiveness will cause his own destruction. However, strong leadership, a shared system of values and an appealing vision can preserve the world and bind the nations in a more binding community (1965; 1970: 58-62; 1972: 59; 1973: 723; 1986: 194).³

From the 1960s, Brzezinski believed that his time was caught between two ages. On the one hand, he thought that "[t]he modern world is [...] entering [...] the new technetronic age" (1969: 163); the world "is ceasing to be an arena in which relatively self-contained, 'sovereign' and homogeneous nations interact, collaborate, clash, or make war" (1970: 3); and that international politics was therefore in a period of transition towards "a new global politics" (1973: 719). International politics is affected by new rules and new forces. Ideologies and moral values were seen to be becoming more important than military power as "[n]o army can withstand the strength of an idea whose time has come" (1965: xiv; cf. 1962: 4; 1964: 17-70; 1970: 274; 1972: 55; 1973: 718; 1974: 55).

From this point of view, Brzezinski was optimistic as human kind was moving to a better world. The cold war – the ideological struggle between the United States and the Soviet Union – would, he believed, continue, but its intensity would strongly diminish, since the appeal of communism had almost disappeared (1964: 409-436; 1965: 44; 1970: 296). America was facing a bigger opponent, he believed, in its spiritual emptiness, because a "society that does not believe in anything is a society in state of dissolution" (1970: 241; cf. 1973: 714, 722; 1976: 73, 96). The United States should therefore define its principles and act on its "devotion to liberal democracy" (1970: 242). Brzezinski's advice, therefore, was to supplement American foreign policy with a policy of

planetary humanism, which was aimed at the development of global consciousness about ecology, development, social justice and equality (1970: 52-54; 1973: 717; 1976: 65).

On the other hand, Brzezinski thought that the old reality of sovereign states still affected international politics and in fact obstructed historical progress (1970: 24; 1974/75: 65-66). When, during the 1970s and 1980s, the new age still had not arrived, he started to dig into this obstructing force. He assumed that geopolitics was responsible (1983b; 1984; 1985; 1986). He believed conflict and war to be conditioned by geography. The cold war was therefore nothing more than "the legatee of the old, almost traditional, and certainly geopolitical clash between the great oceanic powers and the dominant land powers" (1986: 12).

This approach resulted in a more pessimistic view. The interference of the cyclical geopolitical force and the modernizing technetronic revolution had led to a stalemate: the technetronic revolution was freezing the conflict in a cold war, while the geopolitical struggle was obstructing progress. Brzezinski thus stated that the Soviet Union was a disruptive world power and not a revolutionary power as Kissinger assumed (1984: 156; 1986: 130). It was therefore not possible to draw the Soviet Union into the international order. Stalemate could only be broken by removing the Soviet obstacle and by winning the cold war (1983a: 532; 1984: 154; 1986: 259-268). "Since victory in the traditional sense has been made anachronistic by the onset of the nuclear age," Brzezinski wrote, "America should pursue the goal of prevailing historically over Moscow by actively promoting the decentralization of the Soviet orbit internally and the pacification of Soviet behavior externally" (1986: 267). This required, according to him, global conventional flexibility, technological superiority and limited strategic offensive and defensive capabilities (1986: 145-193).

Brzezinski's reaction to the end of the cold war – In the period 1987-90, Brzezinski kept a close track of the events. Again, the characteristic dichotomy between the geopolitical and idealistic image came to the fore. The latter was used to understand the developments, while the former was used to deduce their meaning. Because of this, Brzezinski's work looked like a double-faced head. On the one hand, he foresaw the downfall of the Soviet empire, while on the other hand his geopolitical fears remained unchanged. There is thus a huge gap between Brzezinski's *Game Plan* (1986) and his *The Grand Failure* (1989). Even up to the point that one critic sighed: "how would Brzezinski relate the thesis of *The Grand Failure* to the very different, defensive concerns of *Game Plan*?" (Johnston 1989: 66). This ambiguity disappeared after he accepted the end of the cold war as a fact.

The technetronic revolution did, according to Brzezinski, lead to the inevitable fall of the Soviet Union. "The technetronic revolution, which so

transformed the nature of the distribution of power," he wrote, "found Marxists-Leninists still clinging to outdated concepts derived from the early phases of the industrial revolution" (1989a: 242; cf. 1987b: 168). The Soviet Union could not enter the new era as it lacked real participation from its civilians: Moscow had missed the necessary democratic, economic and technological revolution (1987b: 168; 1988a: 1-2; 1989a: 258). Moreover, autarchy and independence were no longer valuable assets. "Autarchy," he stated, "is a fetter on efficiency. [...] Full exploitation of the world market [...] will be a precondition for continuing national prosperity" (1987b: 168; cf. 1988a: 4-5). This statement contained an implicit acknowledgement that his geopolitical view was no longer valid, as independence and autarchy were important geopolitical assets of the Soviet Union. However, it did not have consequences for Brzezinski's beliefs, since he strictly separated both views: some articles were idealistically motivated, while others were written from a geopolitical point of view. Nevertheless, he did use it to explain the developments in the Soviet Union. The three initiatives of Gorbachev – glasnost, perestroika and democratization – were all meant to solve the problem of political, social and economic participation (1987b: 169). Brzezinski, however, never believed that success was possible. In 1987, he foresaw the fall of Soviet communism while a year later he thought it would happen soon: "Democracy – and not communism – will dominate the twenty-first century" (1989a: 250; cf. 1987b: 174; 1988a: 158).

During the above-mentioned period, Brzezinski did also write about the geopolitical meaning of these developments. Though his idealistic structure pointed to a victorious end of the cold war, his geopolitical view showed him a different story. The United States, he wrote, could well lose the cold war, since "the position of the United States shows signs of dangerous deterioration relative to that of its adversary" (1988a: 249). Within his geopolitical structure, he used the same mechanisms for dissonance reduction as Kissinger: denial and bolstering. He also pointed to the fact that: Gorbachev could be replaced, the reforms were neither consequential nor irrevocable, the reforms were designed to improve the Soviet system, and that the leadership had displayed manipulative skills (1987a: 10; 1988a: 242-245). Thus he stated that the "vigorous geostrategic competition between the two powers will continue" (1988a: 8; 1988b: 695). Moreover, he believed that Gorbachev had moved the centre of gravity to other areas such as Nicaragua and Afghanistan. Even the Soviet withdrawal from the latter did not change Brzezinski's mind, since it "was only after that option failed [...] that Gorbachev vigorously sought a political agreement" (1988c: 141); he could easily turn against Pakistan (1988b: 689). Thus, Brzezinski painted a grim geopolitical picture of the cold war, while at the same time being optimistic in his idealistic writings.

When the cold war was nearing its end, the idealistic structure had become

the dominant one in Brzezinski's worldview. Already in 1988 he wrote that "national security involves wider considerations, including political statecraft, economic strength, technological innovation, ideological vitality, and others" (1988a: 1). In 1989, however, he pictured the cold war essentially as an ideological struggle instead of a geopolitical inevitability (1989b: 32-33; 1989c: 36). With the end of the cold war Brzezinski had returned to his work from the 1960s and 1970s (1990a/b), though he did not part with his geopolitical view; he just changed the meaning of the concept (1989c: 33).

The effects of the end of the cold war on Brzezinski's belief system – After the end of the cold war, Brzezinski returned, temporarily, to his idealistic approach – sometimes even literally. His post cold war ideas strongly resembled those from *Between Two Ages* (1970). He, again, saw opportunities to enter a new and better world: "A truly new world order, based on consensus, rule of law and peaceful adjudication of disputes, may eventually become a reality" (1991: 20; cf. 1991/92:16). Ideas, not geopolitics, was driving history (1993: x), and global political problems were "socioeconomic, environmental, and even philosophical [...] thus less and less susceptible to [...] the application of military power" (1993: 99).

On the other hand, Brzezinski feared chaos and anarchy if things got out of control. The West is characterized by "spiritual emptiness", while at the same time "global inequality is bound to become a major issue" (1993: 65). This could lead to a fundamentalist South as "the utopian fanatic could [...] yield to the clash between the insatiable consumer and the starving spectator" (1993: 81). A fascist Russia that "would inevitably become a destructive force contributing to a world increasingly unable to control its destiny," he added, could make up the North (1993: 181). Just as *Between Two Ages* (1970), the message of *Out of Control* (1993) was that without a strong and inspiring leader, the forces of chaos would be stronger than the forces of hope. Concern over global ecology could thereby fulfil the same function as planetary humanism in the 1970s (1993: 185).

After 1993, when there was still no sign of a better world, Brzezinski's pendulum was moving away from his idealistic structure. The Russian threat started to dominate his work, and his writings concentrated, once more, on the geopolitical aspects of world politics: "The formulation of a comprehensive and integrated Eurasian geostrategy is therefore the purpose of this book," he wrote in 1997 (1997: xiv; cf. 1994; 1995). Though elements of his idealistic structure were still visible – such as a proposed trans-Eurasian security system – he seems to have closed *Between Two Ages* (1970), and this time he returned to *Game Plan* (1986). In short, the end of the cold war resulted dominance of the idealistic structure for only a short time. Within a few years, he had returned to his geopolitical view. This event, therefore, hardly affected his

belief system or his belief system structure. Both structures and their mutual core are still visible in his work. Brzezinski was using his views with imagination, but he hardly offered any new insights.

4 Conclusion

The intention of this article was to illuminate and to understand the reactions of two security experts to the end of the cold war. It has dealt with the question: How and to what extent did the end of the cold war affect the beliefs of defence-conservative security experts? To answer the research question, a theoretical framework was developed with which it was possible to interpret, in a systematic manner, the way in which these experts have dealt with and adapted to new information. This framework was based on insights from the belief system approach. Steinbruner's dichotomy between theoretical and uncommitted thinkers has been used as an organizational principle, as empirical research did not always support the assumption that experts possess only one structure of mutually connected beliefs: incoherence among beliefs or compartmentalization of different networks of beliefs is possible. Based on this framework, the results of an in-depth study of two well-known security experts were presented: Henry Kissinger, a theoretical thinker, and Zbigniew Brzezinski, an uncommitted thinker. The results show that the end of the cold war hardly affected the beliefs of both defence-conservative security experts.

The operational code analysis of Kissinger showed a consistent, tightly knit and hierarchically structured belief system that was organized around a single core. The basic structure of this system was resistant to change, as the processing of information was strongly deductive. When confronted with challenging information, Kissinger tried to explain this in accordance with his own beliefs. Abelson's modes of resolution of belief dilemmas were useful concepts to describe the way in which he reacted to challenging information. As expected, denial and bolstering were used more frequently than differentiation and transcendence. At this stage of the process, Kissinger did also make use of counterfactual reasoning. In order to lessen the tension between perceptions and beliefs, he seemed to have used this method to gain a form of structural flexibility that Brzezinski already possessed, namely an alternative. When the cold war unambiguously ended, Kissinger could integrate this event without much difficulty: he considered the cold war nothing more than a regrettable exception in world history. He maintained his beliefs, which, therefore, still exert influence on his perceptions.

After an operational code analysis of Brzezinski's writings, it appeared that his belief system did have a double structure. Within each structure there was a certain amount of stability and coherence, but together the structures were

inconsistent. In the wake of challenging information, Brzezinski did not preserve the dominant structure, but used the other belief pattern in order to comprehend the new situation. Therefore, he frequently switched between his idealistic and realistic belief structures. Brzezinski displayed some dissonant reduction mechanisms in reaction to the challenging information in the period 1987-90, but on a lesser scale and only in the dominant structure of that moment. He easily switched between belief structures in order to explain and understand the challenging information. As an uncommitted thinker, he was able to adjust more easily to changing circumstances than Kissinger. Brzezinski integrated the new information in his idealistic structure, but at the same time, denied the importance of the event from his geopolitical point of view. When the cold war came to a close, he only promoted his idealistic structure to the dominant belief pattern. Later, when the new order did not arise, he easily switched back to his geopolitical approach. In short, the double structure made it easy for Brzezinski to deal with dissonant information.

In conclusion, this study has uncovered the ways in which two well-known strategists dealt with challenging information. It showed the perseverance of their belief systems as the end of the cold war hardly changed their beliefs. The same could also be true for other security experts, but further research is necessary before such a claim could be validated.

Notes

1. See for the analysis of a few cases, George 1979b: 50.
2. For a detailed analysis of these security experts, see Van den Assem 1998: 47-138
3. Hence Brzezinski's work for the Trilateral Commission, which he founded together with some other people.

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