

Letter to the NYU Community on Henry Kissinger

“The illegal we do immediately, the unconstitutional takes a little longer.” Henry Kissinger, 1975

For over half a century, Henry Kissinger has stood as the morally reprehensible poster child of U.S. militarism and imperialism. Far from being the renowned master practitioner of international affairs that institutions like NYU Stern portray him as, Mr. Kissinger has left a legacy of economic devastation, physical destruction, violence, human misery, and death. His greatest contributions to U.S. history are those of illegal bombing campaigns, failed military threats, direct involvement in coups and support for dictatorships, and the elongation of devastating, bloody wars for his own political gain. He was the architect of programs which were responsible for the deaths of hundreds of thousands of people, the destabilization of several nations, and the enabling of brutal, genocidal regimes. Millions of people, particularly in Southeast Asia, continue to suffer to this day due to actions carried out by Henry Kissinger. He leaves behind a legacy of decisions and policies so violent and horrific that any acknowledgement, or validation of him by NYU is an indefensible act at odds with the values NYU claims to represent and the values of the NYU student body and faculty at large.

New York University, as an institution run by administration and as a community, is accountable to its community members. Out of love and support for each other, we must act in solidarity with our peers whose lives Kissinger's violent policies negatively impacted, and continue to negatively impact in their repercussions. We must not allow his ideas and practices to proliferate, normalized under the guise of foreign policy serving the American national interest. Current and future policymakers in many fields of study call NYU their community. NYU's global sites involve us in the affairs of other countries, and we must ensure that NYU, which is our community and our institution, holds itself accountable for the way it operates in those countries. From labor exploitation in NYU Abu Dhabi's construction, to NYU's role in the gentrification of both Manhattan and Brooklyn, and now the normalization of war criminals like Kissinger, we are complicit in the legacy of U.S. imperialism, and must take a stand against it.

Mr. Kissinger's entry into the United States Government came in 1968 when he **undermined peace talks that the LBJ administration planned to carry out with the North Vietnamese**. Kissinger was caught on tape *twice* admitting to sending confidential, illegally obtained information about the talks to Republican presidential candidate Richard Nixon, who then contacted the North Vietnamese promising a better deal if he were elected. They accepted, Nixon was elected, and the war continued on for seven more gruesome, pointless years.

During his tenure as National Security Advisor and Secretary of State under President Nixon, Kissinger personally presided over a secret and illegal bombing campaign of Laos and Cambodia for four years during the Vietnam War -- both of which were neutral nations in the conflict. During this time, Kissinger personally planned and presided over the dropping of **500,000 tons of explosives on Cambodia and 2.5 million tons of explosives on Laos, killing at least 100,000 civilians**. These economically and politically devastating campaigns severely undermined the functioning of Cambodian society, paving way for the brutal reign of Pol Pot and the Khmer Rouge, who killed approximately 1.5 - 3 million people during the Cambodian genocide. There are still thousands of undetonated explosives in the soils of both nations which continue to explode and permanently maim, disable, and kill innocent people.

In addition to his secret and illegal bombing campaigns, Kissinger was one of the chief orchestrators of the C.I.A.-backed coup of democratically elected Chilean President Salvador Allende in

1973. After Augusto Pinochet took dictatorial control of the country, he began a brutal program of dissent suppression and violence. Official numbers list **80,000 people jailed, 27,555 tortured, and around 3,000 executed or “disappeared,” but scholars estimate that the real number of victims ranges from 150,000 to 300,000.** As political prisoners and dissidents were being tortured, raped, and thrown out of helicopters during Pinochet’s regime, Henry Kissinger had no regrets about his role in destroying Chilean democracy, and in 1976 told Pinochet, “In the United States, as you know, we are sympathetic with what you are trying to do here.” This dictatorship served as a model for coups and dictatorships across South America, a military putsch across the continent called *Operación Condor*. The United States financially supported these regimes and trained their military forces in what are now contemporary interrogation techniques (i.e. torture). **In Argentina, the number of disappearances has officially reached 30,000.** In Brazil, the US-backed military dictatorship eventually took President João Goulart’s life, alongside thousands of other Brazilians. The countries hit by these **systematic** practices include Bolivia, Uruguay, Paraguay, among other countries in South America. “The declassified record shows that Secretary of State Henry Kissinger was briefed on Condor and its “murder operations” on August 5, 1976.” Two years later, he was touted as a guest of honor during the world cup by the military generals in Argentina. The legacy of Condor is still felt in Latin American democracies today.

It was under Kissinger’s tenure as Secretary of State that the United States escalated a program of economic and political support for white minority African nations such Rhodesia and apartheid-South Africa -- a program referred to by State Department officials as the “tar baby option.” Kissinger also notably asked Arkansas Senator William Fulbright “I wonder what the dining room is going to smell like?” as the two were traveling to a dinner party with African ambassadors. Once, in a 1972 conversation with Richard Nixon, Kissinger referred to Idi Amin, a former president of Uganda, as “an ape without an education.”

Beyond Henry Kissinger’s support for policies and actions that have killed thousands of innocent people, Kissinger has repeatedly made racist comments and shown disregard for human rights and human lives. From his derogatory remarks calling Indians “bastards” to saying “if they put Jews into gas chambers in the Soviet Union, it is not an American concern. Maybe a humanitarian concern,” Kissinger has made it clear that he is a racist in both his actions and deeds. Had any other public figure made such statements, they would have been widely rejected by the NYU community. Unfortunately, Kissinger’s status as former Secretary of State has shielded him from the appropriate level of scrutiny for too long.

We reject the institutional acceptance of the war criminal Henry Kissinger and recognize the role he has played in intensifying U.S. imperial violence. When this man is publicly celebrated as a wise sage of diplomacy, national security, and foreign affairs, his despicable hawkishness is implicitly endorsed -- paving the way for further violence and death. Given the heightening of the U.S.’s presence abroad and the increasing militarization of American society under the Trump administration, it is especially urgent that we strongly condemn those who, time and time again, have worked for the interests of empire while killing tens of thousands and irreversibly changing the lives of millions for worse. The results of Kissinger’s foreign policy are not a thing of the past- people alive today suffer because of his actions, and his presence at NYU normalizes and condones that suffering.

We, as students and faculty of New York University, and stakeholders in the surrounding NYC community, unequivocally condemn NYU Stern’s decision to host Henry Kissinger on campus on October 16th and ask that the university cancel the “In Conversation with Mervyn King” event featuring

Henry Kissinger. We ask for accountability from university administration in regards to the process through which white supremacists, eugenicists, and war criminals are invited to speak on campus.

Signed,

NYU Against Fascism
Amnesty International at NYU
NYU Asian American Political Action Coalition
Coalition on Law and Representation (CoLR)
NYU Disorient
NYU Dream Team
NYU GSOC-UAW Local 2110
NYU Incarceration to Education Coalition
NYU Jewish Voice for Peace
Queer Union at NYU
NYU Students for Justice in Palestine
NYU Student Labor Action Movement, USAS #44
NYC, NYU, Hunter and City College Young Democratic Socialists of America

NYC About Face
The Cart Department
CODEPINK NYC
Cypurr Collective
NYC Democratic Socialists of America
East Timor and Indonesia Action Network (ETAN)
International Socialist Organization - Downtown Branch
International Action Center
NYC Jewish Voice for Peace
Metropolitan Anarchist Coordination Council (MACC)
New Politics Magazine
Scientist Action and Advocacy Network
NYC Veterans for Peace
NYC War Resisters League