

# Despite flaws, Kissinger system could mean an era of stability

By Robin Ranger

The recent October war in the Middle East and the subsequent Arab cutback in oil supplies emphasized how vulnerable medium powers like Canada remain to superpower actions over which they have no control. Henry Kissinger's "pentagonal balance of power" looked, from this viewpoint, suspiciously like an old-fashioned condominium of the United States and the U.S.S.R., facilitating their continued competition for influence at the expense of third parties and their preservation of the ideological and territorial *status quo* in their respective spheres of influence. Does this mean that Dr. Kissinger should be seen as a new Metternich, intent on securing an alliance between the conservative superpowers to support their interests, while defending these with Bismarck's cynical use of *Realpolitik* and force? Or should Dr. Kissinger be seen as attempting to identify and reinforce the factors making for stability in the current international system so that it can adapt to change without disintegrating, the fate of the Metternich and Bismarck systems?

The comparisons with Metternich, the reactionary conservative, and Bismarck, the man of "blood and iron", were inevitable, given Dr. Kissinger's discussion of their respective approaches to diplomacy, together with his other writings and his actions as architect of President Richard Nixon's foreign policy since 1968. These works suggest that Dr. Kissinger's international political ideas are based on a more complex notion of the relationship between stability and change, and the altered role of force in the international system than has been assumed. His doctoral thesis on Metternich stressed the Austrian Chancellor's preoccupation in 1815 with the need to restore a European balance of power against the revolutionary forces of nationalism and liberation unleashed by the French Revolution, forces that had also enabled France to achieve hegemony over Europe. What became known as the Metternich system depended on the major actors in the inter-

national system having a long-term interest in preserving the territorial and ideological *status quo* sufficient to outweigh any short-term gains from its disruption. This interest was reinforced by a common conservative, anti-revolutionary ideology that enabled Metternich to present his policies as those dictated by loyalty to a common set of values, rather than those dictated by Austrian self-interest.

## Conceptions of stability

Dr. Kissinger has clearly drawn on Metternich's conception of a stable international system as one that provided any power able to disturb the *status quo* with an even greater interest in its preservation, so that any changes would be evolutionary, rather than revolutionary, in terms both of the means used and the ends sought. Hence Dr. Kissinger's re-

*Dr. Ranger is a member of the Department of Political Science at St. Francis Xavier University in Antigonish, where he lectures, among other subjects, on the nature of the international political system. He received his doctorate from the University of London with a thesis entitled Arms Control Proposals and Concepts in Changing Political Context — 1958-72. He has been a research associate at Columbia University's Institute of War and Peace Studies and has lectured at the University of Aberdeen, Queen's University (Kingston, Ontario) and the University of British Columbia's Institute of International Relations. Professor Ranger has written widely on questions of international strategic developments. He served in 1971-72 as arms-control consultant to the Defence Research Board's Defence Research Analysis Establishment. He has undertaken a book-length study on the issues raised by current negotiations on mutual and balanced force reductions and their implications for Canada. The views expressed are those of Dr. Ranger.*

