A PLOT THICKENS

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Abstract

What a dream. So bizarre. How strange to see himself shrunken, like a pocket-size person. But there he was, Kenneth Maxwell, renowned scholar, rendered a tiny creature trembling at the windswept ramparts of his dream. Gargantuan figures loomed above, gazing down on this mere morsel.

Resumen

Que sueño. Por tanto extraño. Tan extraño como verse disminuido a sí mismo, como una persona de bolsillo. Pero ahí estaba, Kenneth Maxwell, renombrado estudioso, una diminuta criatura temblando en su sueño. Una figura gigantesca se cernia por encima de las cifras, mirando hacia abajo en este simple bocado.

Maxwell awoke. The dream trailed him out of bed. I've seen this somewhere before," he thought, vexed for a while until he realized that a picture from his favorite childhood book had scripted his subconscious. He'd become Gulliver, but little as a Lilliputian, facing giants in the phantasmagoric land of Brobdingnag.

The dream seemed to track loosely with Maxwell's reality. He had faced some towering figures of his own. And in a paper to be published that day, Dec. 2, on a

Harvard University Web site, he would criticize the credibility of the vaunted Council on Foreign Relations, his former employer and the grande dame of all think tanks.

Maxwell, 64, had been a senior fellow at the council for 15 years. For 11 years, he also reviewed books for Foreign Affairs, the prestigious council journal. And now he would accuse both entities of suppressing debate and silencing his voice because of pressure from Henry Kissinger, the former national security adviser, secretary of state and global power broker.

Maxwell's writings indeed upset Kissinger, say Kissinger's associates. Maxwell had revisited a bitter debate, still red-hot after three decades, about Chile and Kissinger and the depth of U.S. involvement in the fall of one regime and the rise of another.

It is, at bottom, a debate about history and the battle to define it. It is about power -- its uses, its abuses.

"In the foreign-policy world, history is power," says Leslie Gelb, president emeritus of the council. "Who is right or wrong in the past either gives or withholds power today."

Chile sounds like old news, except that it still is news. The country's former dictator, Gen. Augusto Pinochet, keeps popping up in headlines -- most recently regarding the Riggs Bank money laundering scandal. And in December, a Chilean judge ruled that Pinochet can be tried for kidnapping and murder.

Chile still reverberates along America's ideological divides over human rights and foreign policy, echoing the old realpolitik-vs.-moralism debate heard during the Cold War, when Kissinger and people like him saw in Chile a domino about to fall.

So the battle over Chile goes on, with the latest skirmish revolving around this question: Did the council cave to pressure from Kissinger and his allies and stop Maxwell's writings about Chile? Council officials deny that they responded to any pressure. Kissinger himself won't comment.

Or did Maxwell, sensitive to any perceived threat to his intellectual freedom, overreact? Maxwell firmly believes his perception of Kissinger's influence was based in fact. And Maxwell is not alone in his belief, for Kissinger, a Nobel Peace Prize winner, is known for hitting back at critics, for staunchly policing his image.

"Our sense is that Henry does that all the time," says Riordan Roett, a supporter of Maxwell's who has been a member of the Council on Foreign Relations for 25 years and is director of Western Hemisphere studies at the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies.

Maxwell awoke that December morning and realized Kissinger was among the giants in his dream.

What the hell have I done, taking on all of these people?" he thought.

A Lofty Place

The Council on Foreign Relations is a formidable place filled with formidable people -- former Cabinet secretaries and ambassadors, current CEOs and pundits of the media elite -- who've fired their reputations over the years in the foreign policy kiln.

Even its headquarters -- at Park Avenue and 68th Street in Manhattan, in a mansion once owned by a Standard Oil director -- speaks of status, of power.

High officials leaving government go to the council to roost. Those seeking the reverse trek use the council to launch government careers. Heads of state give speeches there. Diplomats mix it up. Journalists gather to hash over issues of the day (this writer spoke on such a panel there 5 1/2 years ago). And task forces meet to craft reports on pressing national and global policy.

That's how Kissinger, now 81, got his start back in the 1950s, on a council study group. Council intellectuals, back then, were at the cutting edge of U.S. foreign policy. Those were the days of George Kennan and the doctrine of "containment," of Paul Nitze, the architect of Cold War policy. Kissinger, then the young upstart from Harvard, arrived at the council and wrote a 1957 book, "Nuclear Weapons and Foreign Policy," that planted the notion of "limited" nuclear war in the policy mind-set.

The original limited-war concept actually was Nitze's, Walter Isaacson wrote in his 1992 book, "Kissinger: A Biography." And when Nitze wrote a negative review of Kissinger's book, Kissinger threatened to sue for libel (but didn't). The two men remained at odds for decades, Isaacson wrote.

Over the years, Kissinger's name became virtually synonymous with the council, even though the only high office he held there was a four-year term on the board ending in 1981.

And the extent of his power at the council can be traced through his personal and business relations. He and his New York-based international consulting firm, Kissinger Associates, are closely linked to two of the council's most powerful figures.

Peter Peterson, a secretary of commerce during the Nixon administration, is the council's chair, as well as chairman of the Blackstone Group, a global investment firm. According to Blackstone's Web site, it has a strategic alliance with Kissinger Associates. (Another Kissinger firm is called Kissinger McClarty Associates.)

And Maurice Greenberg, honorary vice chair of the council, is also a Kissinger business associate. Greenberg is chairman of American International Group, the huge insurance and financial firm that owns a stake in Blackstone. Kissinger leads AIG's international advisory board, Greenberg's spokesman said in an e-mail

With hefty ambitions and huge egos among the council's 4,000 members, it is inevitable that disputes arise, albeit handled quietly, diplomatically.

"Interestingly, it's usually about history and how the history books will read," says Gelb, a former assistant secretary of state and New York Times columnist.

A New Assignment

In his spacious third-floor office within the council's ornate digs, packed with his thousands of books and his pair of Fernando Botero watercolors of a prototypical Latino caudillo, Maxwell pored over a new book: **"The Pinochet File: A Declassified Dossier on Atrocity and Accountabilit**y." The book's release in 2003 marked the 30th anniversary of the overthrow and death of Chilean President Salvador Allende.

Maxwell's editor at Foreign Affairs, James F. Hoge Jr., had asked him to review it.

Being a book reviewer for Foreign Affairs was but one of Maxwell's hats. Another was serving as a senior fellow for the council. A Cambridge- and Princeton-educated historian who is a Brit turned naturalized U.S. citizen, Maxwell is recognized as a virtual guru in his field.

"He's a towering figure in the field of Latin American history and politics," says John Coatsworth, director of the David Rockefeller Center for Latin American Studies at Harvard, where Maxwell is now a visiting scholar.

The latest of Maxwell's five well-received books (not including the many others he's edited) is 2003's "Naked Tropics: Essays on Empire and Other Rogues," which ranges from the history of chocolate to the Amazon to the slave trade.

An intellectually fastidious scholar with a sharp pen and quick wit, Maxwell was somewhat different from others at the council: He had never served in anyone's government and had no intention of doing so. His is the world of ideas, of historic trends, the power of pure scholarship -- in his case, the esoteric details of Latin American and Iberian history, especially colonial Brazil and its Portuguese rulers.

At the council, he organized seminars on Latin America. He researched books. He wrote articles and reviews. But he did not expect his review of "The Pinochet File" to spark the bitter rhetorical skirmishes to come.

Pages of History

Though 30 years had passed, Chile was "still a lively subject," Hoge said in a recent interview. "On the hard facts of the matter, what exactly was the role the U.S. played [in Chile] is, I think, still open to question." These were the issues that Hoge expected Maxwell would address in his review.

"The Pinochet File" is some 600 pages, a thick collection of declassified U.S. cables and reports compiled by Peter Kornbluh of the National Security Archive, a small nonprofit research library housed at George Washington University.

The book, Kornbluh writes, is about "the denouement of democracy and the rise of dictatorship in Chile," and presents "the ultimate case study of morality -- or lack of it -- in the making of U.S. foreign policy."

It deals in great detail with the level of U.S. foreknowledge of, or involvement in, three pivotal events: the 1970 assassination of Gen. Rene Schneider, chief of the Chilean armed forces; the 1973 coup in which Allende died (whether from suicide or murder remains contested) and Pinochet was installed in his place; and the South American murder conspiracy known as Operation Condor, in which the dictators of the continent's "southern cone" helped each other bump off their enemies. Prominent among Condor's victims was the exiled Chilean defense and foreign minister,

Orlando Letelier, who was slain in a 1976 car bombing on Sheridan Circle, in the middle of the U.S. capital.

Kissinger was the White House national security adviser under President Nixon, as well as his secretary of state, a post he also held under President Ford. He was closely involved with U.S. maneuvering in Chile, making "The Pinochet File" very much a portrait of his statecraft and a condemnation of it.

Countdown to a Coup

Drawing on the evidence of Kornbluh's book, Maxwell wrote in the November/December 2003 issue of Foreign Affairs that the United States "knew about, approved of, and had even assisted in planning" the kidnapping of Schneider.

The United States had wanted to foment a coup that would prevent Allende, elected with a plurality of the vote, from assuming the presidency. Allende was a socialist and, in the Cold War paradigm, that made him a threat.

But Schneider would not support military intervention. So other Chilean military officials plotted, with CIA encouragement, to kidnap him. A week before it was to happen, though, Kissinger decided the plan would not work. He "turned it off," as he told Nixon. The Chilean plotters went ahead anyway. And Schneider was killed.

Maxwell recounts all this in his review, which tracks closely with the 1975 report of the Senate Select Committee to Study Government Operations With Respect to Intelligence Activities, commonly known as the Church Committee, after its chair, Frank Church, the late Democratic senator from Idaho.

The committee noted that the plan was ordered directly by Nixon and that Kissinger was among but a few officials aware of it. (A lawsuit filed in 2001 against Kissinger and the U.S. government by Schneider's family is pending in a federal appeals court.)

Maxwell's rendering of the Sept. 11, 1973, coup that finally did take down Allende also tracks the Church Committee findings: The United States was aware of a coup plan, had encouraged a coup and created a climate for it. The coup was "exactly what Kissinger's boss wanted," Maxwell wrote of Nixon, though he added that there was no direct U.S. involvement in the actual attack on Allende's forces.

In the case of Operation Condor, Maxwell wrote, the United States was aware of the broad conspiracy that involved the intelligence services of Chile, Argentina, Uruguay, Paraguay and Bolivia (as well as Brazil, Peru and Ecuador somewhat later).

In August 1976, Kissinger issued a cable to U.S. ambassadors in the Condor nations, instructing them to warn the heads of states that the United States had heard rumors about Condor actions and that there would be "a most serious moral and political problem" if those rumors were true.

But the demarche for Pinochet apparently was not delivered, according to cables quoted in "The Pinochet File," because of concern about his reaction.

A month later, Letelier was rounding Sheridan Circle on Embassy Row in his Chevrolet Chevelle when a remote control bomb was detonated beneath the car, killing him and one passenger and injuring another.

Kissinger Calling

Kissinger read Maxwell's piece in Foreign Affairs. He was not pleased.

He called Peterson, the council chair, and complained.
Peterson then called Hoge to pass on the complaint.

"I am chairman of this organization," Peterson said in an interview. "This is a member organization. Members pay dues. And people call me and say, 'I'm not pleased,' with one thing or another. I have immense respect for Jim Hoge and even more for the fundamental independence of that magazine. On the other hand, as chairman, when somebody calls me and complains and says, 'I didn't like something,' I turn it over to the people that are responsible."

According to Peterson, his brief conversation with Hoge went this way:

"I said, 'Jim, Henry just called me and he's not happy about some review. I must tell you I haven't read the review. But you're in charge and you're editor.' "

Hoge described the phone call as "an alert" that did not affect his editorial judgment.

"Pete calls when he thinks there's something I ought to know and take into account. It was simply informational," says Hoge.

Kissinger declined to be interviewed about the Maxwell controversy. He wrote in "Years of Upheaval," the 1982 installment of his voluminous autobiography, that allegations about U.S. involvement in Chile's chaos are mere "political mythology."

William D. Rogers, a confidant, business partner and sometime lawyer for Kissinger, believes that too. And he doggedly works to counter the myths.

A respected former diplomatic deputy to Kissinger and semi-retired senior partner at the law firm Arnold & Porter, Rogers speaks derisively of those he calls the "myth makers." They include the Latin American left and, in the United States, they include Kornbluh and Maxwell.

In 2003, Rogers even took on Secretary of State Colin Powell. A reporter had asked Powell for a retrospective view on U.S. policy toward Chile in the 1970s.

"It is not a part of American history that we are proud of," Powell responded.

Rogers was outraged.

"He was implying that the U.S. was morally responsible for what happened in Chile," Rogers says heatedly in his office. "He bought the myth. And I thought that was unfortunate. I called Will Taft" -- the State Department's legal counsel -- "who is an old friend, and I said, 'Gee, get him off this.' " Taft does not dispute Rogers's account.

The State Department issued a statement clarifying Powell's comments: The United States "did not instigate the coup that ended Allende's government in 1973."

Rogers's friend Mark Falcoff, a historian and then a resident scholar at the American Enterprise Institute, was also outraged by the Powell comment. Falcoff knows Chile

well. He authored "Modern Chile 1970-1989: A Critical History." And he too has been working hard to counter the "mythology" of Chile.

In 2003, he worked in tandem with Rogers and Kissinger.

Through Rogers, Kissinger allowed Falcoff to view copies of some of the private transcripts of his 1970s telephone conversations, which at that time were not generally available. (Under pressure from the news media and from Kornbluh's archive, Kissinger agreed last year to allow the Library of Congress to release the transcripts for general consumption.)

Falcoff used them for an article he wrote and tried to place in Foreign Affairs. But Hoge did not accept it.

"It tried to sum up the story [of Chile] before the story can really be summed up," says Hoge. (Falcoff, a friend of Maxwell's since their student days at Princeton, believed for several months thereafter that Maxwell had rejected his piece. He broke off their friendship as a result.)

Instead, Falcoff placed his piece in Commentary, where it ran in November 2003 under the headline "Kissinger and Chile: The Myth That Will Not Die."

In it, he quotes from the Kissinger transcripts -- or rather, he misquotes them.

It is a Sept. 16, 1973, chat between Kissinger and Nixon, discussing the anti-Allende coup that occurred five days earlier. The actual telephone transcript reads:

Nixon: "Well, we didn't -- as you know -- our hand doesn't show on this one though."

Kissinger: "We didn't do it. I mean we helped them. _____ created the conditions as great as possible."

But Falcoff ended Kissinger's quote at "We didn't do it."

Falcoff, who had seen the full quote, said he was not trying to alter history, not trying to create a myth of his own.

"I made a mistake," he said when asked repeatedly. "I should have put that part of the quote in the article. I should have done that."

Feuding in Print

Rogers, meanwhile, geared up to battle Maxwell. He submitted a rebuttal for Foreign Affairs to publish in its January/February 2004 issue.

In criticizing the so-called "case against Kissinger," Rogers wrote that the "myth" of U.S. involvement in Chile was "lovingly nurtured" by the Latin American left and "refreshed" by people like Maxwell and Kornbluh.

("The Case Against Henry Kissinger" was the title of a two-part 2001 Harpers magazine article by Christopher Hitchens that ultimately became a book and the basis for the 2002 documentary "The Trials of Henry Kissinger.")

Rogers called it "mischievous nonsense" for Maxwell to mix the Letelier car bombing into a discussion of U.S. foreknowledge or complicity in Chile. He characterized as "circumstantial at best" any evidence of U.S. responsibility for the Allende coup. And he rejected that the United States had approved of and helped plan the effort to kidnap Schneider.

Hoge printed Rogers's rebuttal, with a response from Maxwell that glibly observed that the dossier of declassified documents "cuts very close to home."

He accused Rogers of "overreaching" and suggested that a "truth commission" could probe the unanswered questions of Chile, rather than answers being "extracted painfully, like rotten teeth."

But what indeed cut close to home was this charge by Maxwell: The Letelier bombing "was a tragedy that might have been prevented."

Rogers shot back hard. In the March/April 2004 issue, he accused Maxwell of "bias." He called it "outrageous" to suggest that the United States could have prevented the bombing.

"One would hope at least that Maxwell's views are understood to be his own and not those of the Council on Foreign Relations, where he is a senior fellow," Rogers wrote.

Calling a Cease-Fire

The debate had grown uglier than Hoge anticipated. Now the council itself was being dragged into it.

Caught between competing views on Chile, Hoge sought the advice of a close friend, William H. Leurs, who also happens to be the State Department official who drafted Kissinger's 1976 cable warning the Condor nations about their activities. Basically, Hoge wanted to talk things through with someone who knew the issues.

Leurs, now president of the United Nations Association of the United States, said the tone of Hoge's call was, "What has happened here? Why has this gotten so serious?"

"I don't think he knew how hot an item the Chile question is," says Leurs Maxwell wanted to write a response to Rogers. But Hoge resisted. They two met on Jan. 30 of last year. Maxwell claims that Hoge told him he was under intense pressure from Kissinger and that Greenberg had called and swore at him for a half-hour. Hoge denies saying these things; he says he discussed with Maxwell how to end the debate. And Greenberg, who would not answer numerous e-mailed questions, did offer a denial that he called Hoge.

Hoge decided to end the Maxwell-Rogers debate, at least in the pages of Foreign Affairs. Rogers's chastisement of the council was the last word. Hoge says he believed he had secured Maxwell's agreement. But Maxwell disputes that and believes he was robbed of the chance to defend himself. The second rebuttal he submitted to Hoge was never printed.

It read, in part: "I am not the issue here; Chile, Condor and Kissinger are. It would be helpful if Kissinger himself would comment on the statements I have quoted. Rogers

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cannot forever provide a shield for his boss to hide behind. The way to clarify the record is to release it in full, not to close off debate first by accusations of mythmaking, now by accusations of bias.

Disengagement Policy

Maxwell's May 2004 resignation letter shocked Hoge as well as Richard Haass, the council president, Haass says. James Lindsay, a council vice president and director of studies, was stunned too, and tried to convince Maxwell to stay.

"Is there any way we can solve this problem?" Lindsay recalls asking him. Maxwell told him no, he already had secured a new spot at Harvard.

As a historian, Maxwell told the council, he could not abide the suppression of free debate that he felt had occurred when Hoge refused to print his second response to Rogers.

Hoge quickly hired a new book reviewer to replace Maxwell: Jeremy Adelman, chairman of the history department at Princeton. But Adelman says his e-mail inbox "was just exploding" with warnings from friends and colleagues about what had happened to Maxwell. It was more trouble than Adelman wanted to handle. He resigned after three weeks.

"They've taken a big hit in their reputation," Adelman says of the journal. "Ken Maxwell was a flag bearer for a certain well-informed, thoughtful engagement with Latin American affairs that people across the spectrum respected."

Hoge also faced the criticism of 11 academics from around the nation, all members of the council. Led by Harvard's John Coatsworth, the group wrote Hoge to express their disappointment with Foreign Affairs.

Hoge printed their letter in the September/October 2004 issue. He did not print the last line: "We urge you to find an appropriate way to repair this lapse before it becomes a permanent stain on the reputation of Foreign Affairs."

Hoge says he thought that statement "ridiculous and uncalled for and unfair." He found another Foreign Affairs book reviewer. This time it was Richard Feinberg, a Latin Americanist from the University of California, San Diego, who is a Clinton-era national security aide well known for his 1972 book "The Triumph of Allende: Chile's Legal Revolution." He would not comment for this article.

The Final Word

Maxwell, these days, toils in a small third-floor garret in a colonial-style building at Harvard -- an office an eighth the size, he jokes,
of his old council digs. But he's discovered there is life beyond the council. To his surprise, he's enjoying a return to the lecture hall, even feels he might be connecting with students.

It is, he jokes in that British crispness, "a freshman experience late in life."
There in his office, under the gaze of his twin Boteros, he wrote about his travails. "The Case of the Missing Letter in Foreign Affairs: Kissinger, Pinochet and Operation Condor," he called it. It is a heavily footnoted 30 pages.

The whole episode, he wrote, is "a sad indication of what happens when editors give more weight to the grumbles of their proprietors and their powerful friends than they do to their sacred duty in a free society of defending the right to free expression of their own writers."

To Haass, it is a case of puzzling overkill.

"I thought it was excessive," he says of Maxwell's accounting. "It just seemed to me an awful lot of work went into that paper for reasons that are unclear to me."Hoge calls Maxwell's paper -- which quotes liberally from Hoge's e-mails -- a "miscarriage" and "utter nonsense." He says Maxwell had misunderstood the chain of events.

"He has put together pieces of information in a way to make his case, but the case itself is wrong," says Hoge. Maxwell says Hoge has been "economical with the truth." All of which raises the question: Who, alas, is right?
But the last word on that -- and on Chile -- has yet to be written.

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