Tom Braden

Kissinger and Sakharov

Henry Kissinger thought long and hard about what to say to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee about Russian physicist Andrei D. Sakharov. What he said may have made sense from our stand point, but from the stand point of Sakharov, Alexander Solzhenitsyn and others among Russia's dissident intellectuals, Kissinger's words must have read like a death sentence.

In brave public announcements from Moscow, the dissidents had been pleading for a different kind of statement, one which insisted on respect for human rights as a prerequisite for detente. Instead, Kissinger gave them a pat on the head. Was he right or wrong?

Consider the dilemma which Kissinger sees. Consider also that if he sees it correctly, it is not only his dilemma but yours and mine. Here it is:

The way to take a strong line on the Russian intellectuals is to suggest that U. S. trade and economic aid will be withheld unless the Russians cease persecuting these men. If the United States takes this line, the Russians might retaliate. The way they might retaliate is to take a similarly strong line on the disarmament talks.

In Kissinger's view, this is a clear and present danger. The Soviet Union wants economic aid. Only the United States can grant it. The United States wants a freeze on the arms race. Only the Soviet Union can grant it. If that's a fair trade, should Sakharov and the others stand in the way?

Kissinger tried to sidestep the dilemma: "I am dismayed by the conditions Sakharov reports. Yet we have as a country to ask ourselves a question: Whether it should be the principal goal of American foreign policy to transform the domestic structure of societies with which we deal . . . ?

It's a good question. But it amounts to telling Sakharov, Solzhenitsyn and the others that, as far as we are concerned, the Soviet Union has a license to hang them.

Kissinger's statement must have come with particular irony for Sakharov. His book, "Progress, Co-existence and Intellectual Freedom" was published in this country with the following blurb on the dust jacket: "A deeply moving testimony to the freedom of the human spirit.—Prof. Henry Kissinger." There is an enormous gap between those words and the words of Secretary of State-designate Henry Kissinger before the Foreign Relations Committee: "I cannot recommend that an entire foreign policy be made dependent on that particular aspect (human rights) of the domestic structure of the Soviet Union."

Is this the gap between the mind of an academician who doesn't know the facts and a responsible official who does? It's hard to make a judgment. A lot of people in Washington who ought to know think the Russian economy is in such terrible shape that the United States can demand almost anything it wants. Kissinger doesn't agree. And Kissinger ought to know, even more than they.

At the very least, Kissinger ought to be subjected to a little heat on this subject. "We have in the past," he told the Foreign Relations Committee, "successfully pointed out to the Soviet leaders the unfortunate impact that some of their policies have on our opinion."

This was an obvious reference to his own successful plea for the lifting of immigration restrictions on Soviet Jews. Perhaps he intends to make a similar personal plea for the Russian intellectuals. His feet should be held to the fire.

By MacNelly in The Richmond News Leader

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