

# Henry Kissinger Is:

- Brilliant  
 Amoral  
 A Hero  
 Devious  
 All of the Above

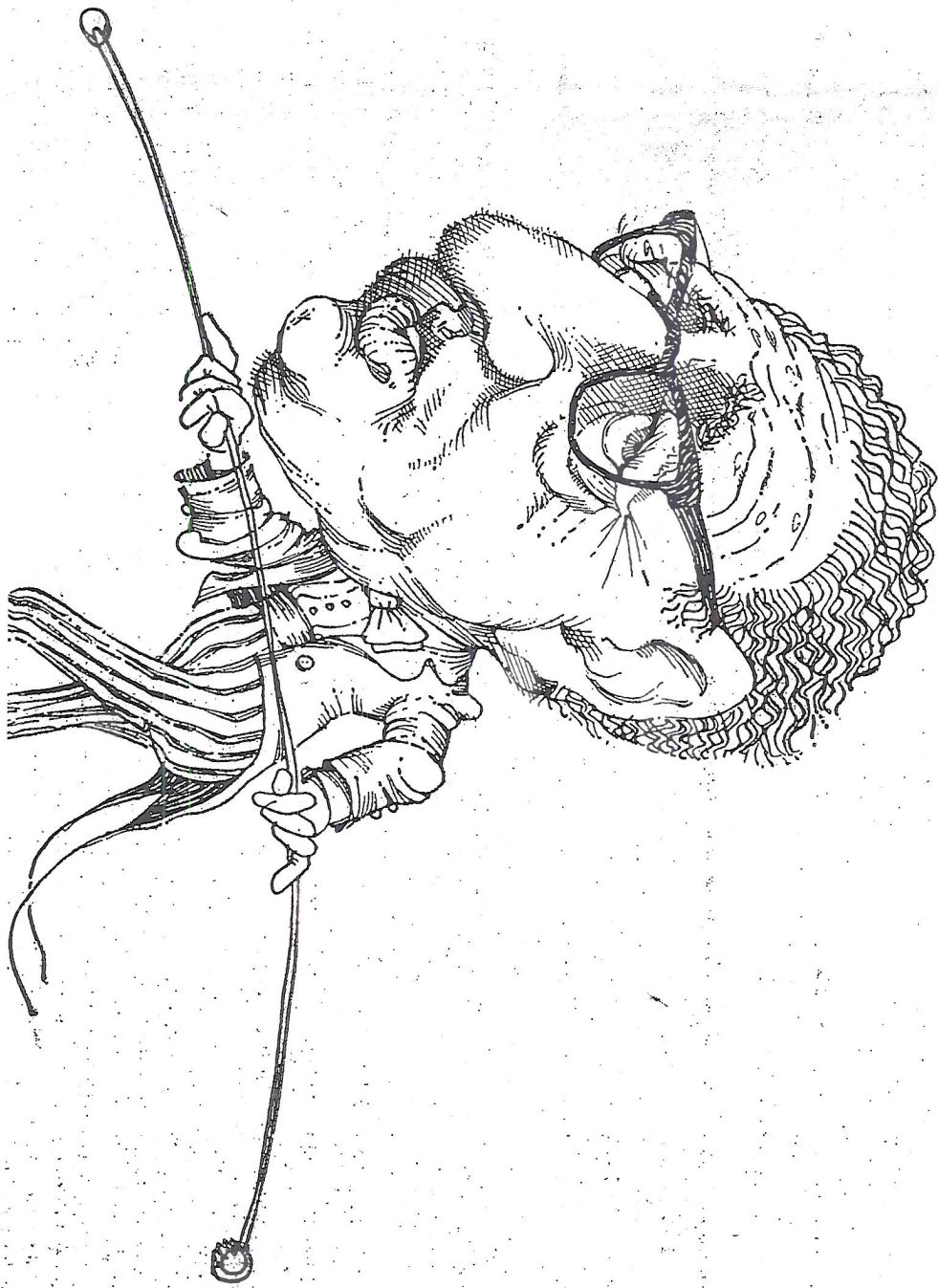
By Richard Holbrooke

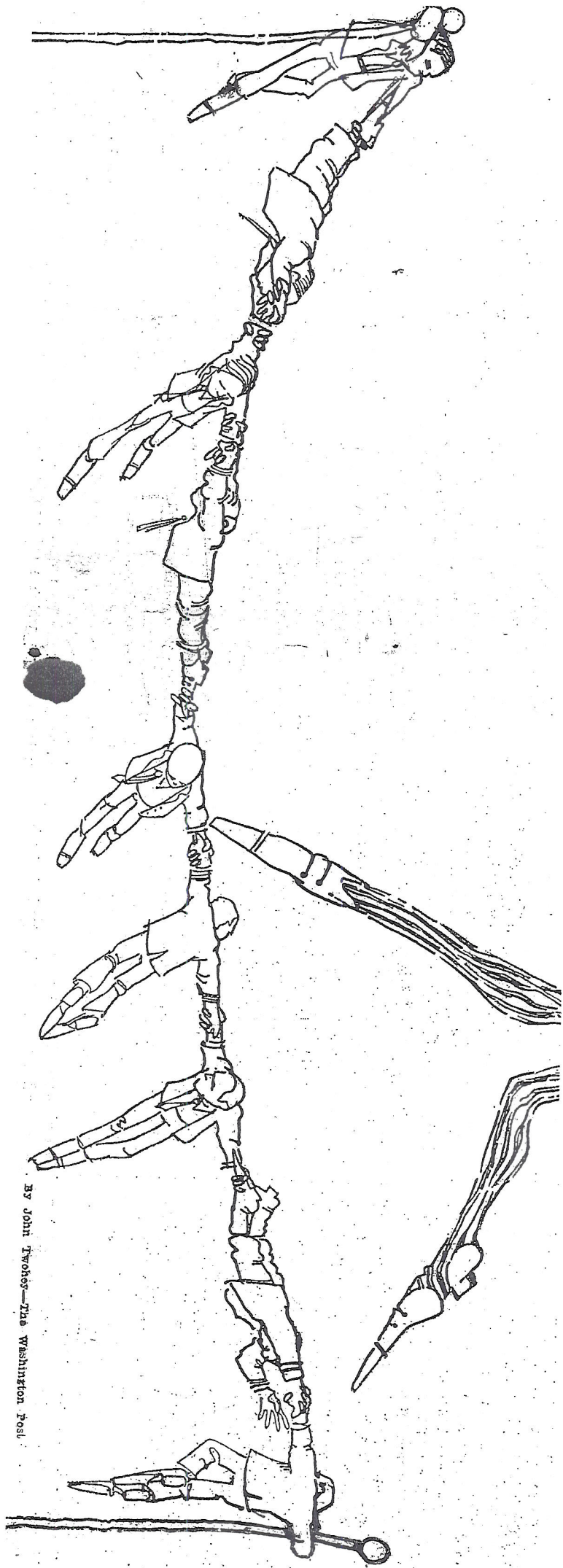
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A STAGGERING AMOUNT already has been written about Henry Kissinger. His books, going back to his study of diplomacy in the early 19th Century, "A World Restored," have been searched for clues to his behavior and beliefs. His travels are reported in detail; his legend grows with each negotiation. A recent poll gave him the highest approval rating of any member of the executive branch since the polls began. He was the overwhelming choice of the Miss Universe contestants as "the greatest person in the world today." And, until recently, he enjoyed perhaps the best press that any public official has had in, at least 15 years. He is good copy, and knows how to feed the press, massage its substantial individual and collective egos and subtly divorce himself from unpopular policies or even—and this required an extraordinarily delicate touch—an increasingly unpopular boss.

The new combination—Ford-Kissinger—is therefore all the more intriguing. An amoral President deeply interested in foreign policy has been replaced by a deeply moral President relatively uninterested in foreign policy. Henry Kissinger remains, certainly the primary symbol of continuity in the executive branch, as Gerald Ford understood on that traumatic Thursday evening when his only statement was that he was asking Kissinger to stay on. Will Kissinger move toward a more open style, taking the cue from his new President? Or will he remain the elusive, manipulative, brilliant diplomatist of recent years?

What is one to make of this man, who is an American hero in an age starved for heroes, who is the target recently of attacks on both his ability and his veracity? For the public, apparently, criticism of Kissinger is not very welcome right now; a television producer told me recently that during a talk show in which former Kissinger aide, Morton Halperin, was critical of Kissinger (Halperin and his wife are suing Kissinger and others for wiretapping their home





By John Tworker—The Washington Post

phone), the station's switchboard was flooded with calls protesting the attacks on America's last, best hope.

As Anthony Lake, once Kissinger's closest aide, now a respected critic and, like the Halperins, pressing with his wife civil charges against his former boss, said: "Up against hero worship, legitimate criticism begins to sound like ungrateful grouching."

But, as Lake has pointed out, we owe it to ourselves to examine the man, his methods and his values, more carefully. He is brilliant, and we are better off with him than without right now, but he is deeply flawed, and the day may come when what he stands for is not in America's interests. In short, thinking about Kissinger is both healthy and necessary.

### A Study in Contradictions

**B**UT THINKING about Kissinger can be confusing and complicated. Consider the following propositions, all of which may be true:

- He is the most successful diplomat and negotiator in American history; but he is one of the most devious men ever to serve in high office.

- He was the outstanding member of the scandal-ridden Nixon administration; but his

statements under oath about his own role left many questions unanswered.

- He ended the American involvement in the Vietnam war; but he allowed the war to go for years longer than necessary.

- He paved the way for an historic opening in our relations with China; but he deliberately ignored and insulted loyal friends and allies in Japan while doing so.

- He conducted brilliant and complex negotiations with the Russians to bring an end to the Cold War; but he sought deals for their own sake, giving away point after point in order to achieve them, and he systematically turned his back on the repression and brutality of the Soviet system.

- He reversed a benighted American policy position on food, taking us for the first time toward support for a desperately-needed world food conference. But he shows no interest in the overriding problems of life and survival in the poorer countries of the world, doing only what is minimally required by public pressure.

- He has restored the State Department to a position of influence in the formulation and implementation of foreign policy. But he has shown continuing and open contempt for the career foreign service he says he wants to reinvigorate.

- He has talked endlessly about the need to institutionalize foreign policy. But he has continued to run foreign policy as a personal, almost private reserve, alone with his President.

- He has made friends—on a personal basis—with leaders of countries long our adversaries, opening up new opportunities for American diplomacy and American business. But he has systematically antagonized many of our traditional friends, showing rudeness to them, failing to take their problems into account.

### Brilliant but Flawed

**T**HERE CAN no longer be any doubt about it—Henry Kissinger is an historic figure whose words and deeds will be analyzed for decades to come. His *persona* has transcended his achievements, in an odd way; anything he does now seems bigger than life. If it is done by Kissinger, it carries with it a unique aura of inevitable success. Thus, he can undertake a difficult diplomatic mission now with people ready to consider his offers more seriously than if they came from anyone else because—well, because he is Kissinger. The magician's reputation precedes him, clearing his path.

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## KISSINGER, From Page B1

Yet he is widely distrusted, and it is significant to note that many of the people who distrust him most are those who know him best. Almost everyone who knows him well, even his strongest supporters, says that he cannot be trusted. He is truly remarkable in this way: what he does well, he does better than anyone in our history; what he does badly he does truly badly—and there is no separating the two.

Henry Kissinger may be a hero to many people, but he is a very complicated and unusual mixture of the exceptionally good and the unnecessarily bad. We, as Americans, do ourselves no credit—although we do what Kissinger hopes we will do—when we find ourselves polarized into a debate over whether or not we should accept Kissinger as an unblemished hero and follow his lead wherever he goes. Such a suspension of our natural and healthy taste for open debate is dangerous. No matter how brilliantly Kissinger performed his last magic trick, Americans should not automatically conclude that he is right every time, for he has made some serious mistakes. While he may be a hero, he should not be our model when we finally move into the post-Watergate era.

First, one must give him his due. Without him the United States would be far worse off, as they used to say, at this point in time. In an administration peopled with pygmies and crooks, he stood out. He has vision, and a certain strategic sense. He understands history (both its use and abuse) and has a unique sense of tactics and timing. He is a brilliant opportunist, in the best sense of the world. Prior to the October, 1973, war between the Arabs and Israel, for example, he had been widely quoted as saying in private that he would never touch the Mideast, that his Jewishness plus the intractability of the situation made it a losing game he would stay out of.

But when the war came, he saw that the historic logjam in the area had been broken, and he seized the opportunity to drive through basic changes in the situation before the logs reformed into their impenetrable mass. Only speed and pressure applied constantly at a number of key points could succeed, and Kissinger knew this. Using a handful of well selected aides, particularly Joseph Sisco, whom he coaxed out of a threatened retirement and elevated to Under Secretary of State, he produced one of the great pieces of modern diplomacy, a technical triumph of awesome proportions. He certainly knew as he did it that it might come unstuck later, that there were risks scattered throughout the agreements and understandings, that you cannot turn aside generations of hatred and suspicion with a few shuttle flights from Jerusalem to Cairo to Damascus to Aswan. But there was an opportunity, and he seized it, risked everything, found a few openings, broadened them, kept up the pressure until a few things fell into place. He could not have done it earlier, and he might not have been able to do it later. Timing was important, and his sense of it must thus far go unchallenged; it was a great achievement.

Again in Vietnam, he thought that he could use the right moment to achieve something. That moment would be after another great North Vietnamese offensive and before the 1972 elections. But here both the problems and the domestic constraints were greater. The President had a deeper personal interest in the outcome of Vietnam than he did in the Mideast; it was long before Watergate was to divert him and he had long had much more than a passing interest in containing communism in Southeast Asia. Mr. Nixon undoubtedly put Kis-

singer under at least one constraint: He would not agree to steps that would lead to American complicity in the downfall of Nguyen Van Thieu as president of South Vietnam. It is reasonable to assume that Mr. Nixon and Kissinger, then assistant for national security, did differ on the relative importance of Vietnam: to Henry Kissinger, it was nothing but a "cruel sideshow," to Richard Nixon, it was a test of everything he had ever stood for, and, furthermore, a test of his personal strength as President.

Not that one should conclude, as several liberal Washington columnists mistakenly did at the time, that this meant that Kissinger was dove and Nixon hawk on Vietnam. To the extent that a criterion for judging people's positions on Vietnam is how *wrong* they felt the war was, then it would be a mistake to portray Kissinger as a dove. Deeply anguished over the continuing carnage he was not; determined to end the war so as to get on with what he considered more important business, such as detente, he certainly was. It is this confusion between objectives and values that has allowed some people to view Kissinger as a secret dove while others regarded him as an immoral war criminal. In his own mind, he was undoubtedly neither, but rather a seeker after a strategic objective—stop American involvement in the war—in the most efficacious way possible. This was his greatest strength, for he was freed from any of the constraints that come with conviction and thus had a maximum freedom of movement. It is also, in a deeper sense, a great weakness.

### Bombing Vietnam

THE PRESS, the American public and Kissinger himself have all turned away from Vietnam in the 20 months since the cease-fire was signed in Paris, but nonetheless it is Kissinger's behavior during that long and arduous negotiation that reveals the most about his values, his strengths and weaknesses. In his important account of those negotiations, written for *Foreign Policy* and reprinted here in June, Tad Szulc portrayed a brilliant and tireless negotiator who had tolerated a meaningless but bloody military stalemate for the first three years of the Nixon administration.

The final deal was arranged under circumstances of the highest drama in October of 1972, as the world watched Kissinger shuttling between Paris, Washington and Saigon. Then, in his original plan, he was to

end up in Hanoi, where, on the eve of the presidential election, he would be revealed signing an agreement with the North Vietnamese. But when Kissinger arrived in Saigon in mid-October to pick up Thieu's approval on his way to Hanoi, he found, instead of a willing ally, a furious and stubborn opponent.

Thieu felt that Kissinger had betrayed him and agreed to terms which would mean the end of his regime. In that perception Thieu was probably right, for Kissinger was showing one of his most consistent and fascinating characteristics: a virtually complete disregard for the problems and circumstances of an ally. Kissinger had been brilliant in dealing with his North Vietnamese adversary—as he would be again later in Moscow, in Cairo, in Damascus, in Peking—but he was trying to ride roughshod over someone whom the Americans had—rightly or wrongly—been supporting for years. The switch in signals was too much for Thieu, who stood his ground and refused to accept the deal that Kissinger had made. And suddenly, the situation also seemed too difficult for President Nixon, who told Kissinger to return to Washington empty-handed.

When Kissinger returned to Paris after the elections to try to renegotiate the deal with Hanoi, he offered, on behalf of Saigon, some changes to the agreement that he and the North Vietnamese had previously made. It was just a negotiating tactic designed to placate Saigon, Kissinger said later, and Szulc quotes him as saying that it was not conceivable that the North Vietnamese would have taken the South Vietnamese demands seriously. That point can never be resolved, but it is important to note that the North Vietnamese, after an eight-day recess, responded by reopening certain questions that the Americans thought were already resolved.

At this moment the United States began Operation Linebacker II — more commonly known as the Christmas bombing of Hanoi. The evidence suggests strongly that this bombing was not done primarily to improve the military position of the South Vietnamese, that it was not done to force Hanoi into relatively minor concessions at the negotiating table (which the North Vietnamese were ready to make anyway). Rather—and it is this understanding of the Christmas bombing which offers us such a clear insight into the amoral brilliance of this disinterested man—the bombing was done in order to bring Thieu around, to rectify Kissinger's miscalculation in Saigon in October.

### The Cyprus Crisis

KISSINGER'S remarkable tactical flexibility usually has given him enormous advantage over less imaginative and more predictable opponents, both domestic and foreign. But there are times, such as Vietnam and the continuing Cyprus crisis, when his value system seems to trap him on the wrong side of an issue.

The Cyprus crisis shows Kissinger at a continual disadvantage, apparently taking sides in a racial-political dispute for reasons which have nothing to do with the dispute itself. Rather, it appears from the limited evidence available that Kissinger chose sides based on his perception of larger strategic considerations; in so doing, he was forced into a callous acceptance of a brutal repression.

In Cyprus, our position shifted twice, and in the opinion of many, each time in the wrong direction. When the Athens-backed coup of Nikos Sampson took place in Nicosia, Kissinger, it has been charged, accepted it, making inadequate attempts to prevent it, or to protest it, or to foresee its dangerous chain-reaction consequences. No doubt he had his eyes fixed at that point on other issues: His President was fighting a losing battle to survive, and there were, as always, those big power relationships at which he is best.

Then, when it became clear that the Turks were going to invade the island and, later, to resume fighting after deliberately provoking a breakdown in the Geneva peace talks, Kissinger again seems to have accepted the inevitable without adequate protestation. He

has tried to suggest in private three things: first, that there was nothing we could have done anyway; second, that in private our representations were far more vigorous than he can admit publicly; and third, that since the Turks were bound to win it was most important to remain in good terms with them.

These points may be well taken, although once again the public record is incomplete. But even if one accepts them, one is left with a strange picture of the United States accepting two successive outrageous acts, one on each side, simply because they were going to happen or had already happened. There were for years many people who deplored, with reason, the self-righteous moralizing of some American leaders. But, in the post-Vietnam reaction to our national missionary impulse, the pendulum sometimes has swung too far the other way.

### Strengths and Weaknesses

KISSINGER'S strengths and weaknesses have become, in the vacuum that Washington is today, an integral part of our national strengths and weaknesses. His management of big power relationships and his personal brilliance have been major national assets. In the crucial incident of the Christmas bombing of 1972—crucial because those days of unnecessary and brutal bombing were the darkest of the entire long war—as in the Cyprus crisis and several other incidents, one can see both the strengths and weaknesses of what might be called the Kissinger Value System:

1. *Kissinger is the smartest man around these days.* Not because he is an intellectual, a Harvard professor, an historian—his real brilliance comes not from his academic background but from an extraordinary intuitive sense of how to handle people, to make them think that he agrees with them, to be different things to different people.

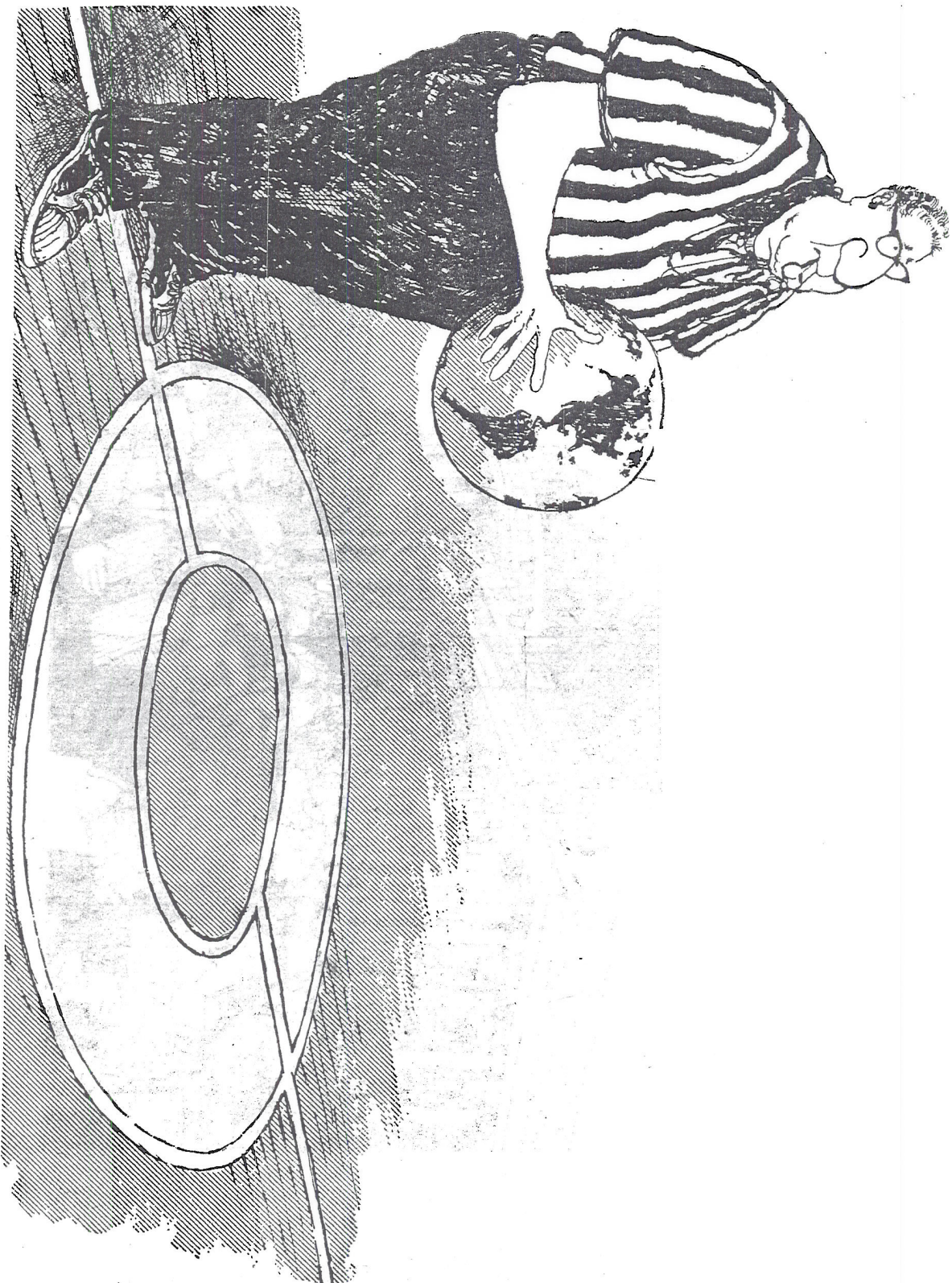
This ability is combined with a stunning capacity to recall details of earlier positions, to be able to dredge up facts and earlier points of view which most people would long ago have forgotten. Thus, for example, he once challenged a friend by asking why he still was not satisfied with our position in Vietnam, inasmuch as the administration had done two of the three things that he once had suggested in a private memo to Kissinger. The memo had been written two years earlier, and Kissinger was using it perfectly to support his position, using flattery by trying to suggest that the memo had had some effect (which it surely could not have had).

2. *He is the most articulate man in Washington, the cleverest with words.* Time and again, his precision and inventiveness with words have misled reporters and listeners without quite being lies. When asked if a secret paper that he and Soviet Ambassador Anatoly Dobrynin had signed after the 1972 SALT agreement constituted an additional agreement, he immediately called it an "interpretive statement." Asked why it had not been submitted to Congress as required by law, he said, in a classic Kissinger answer: "The interpretive statement as such was not submitted to Congress, but the interpretation was . . ." Such word games leave the rest of us behind.

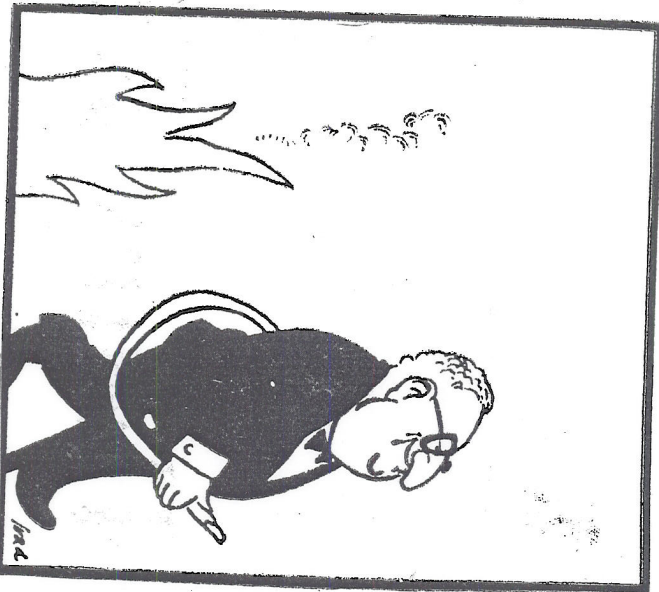
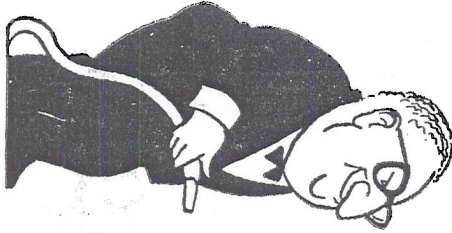
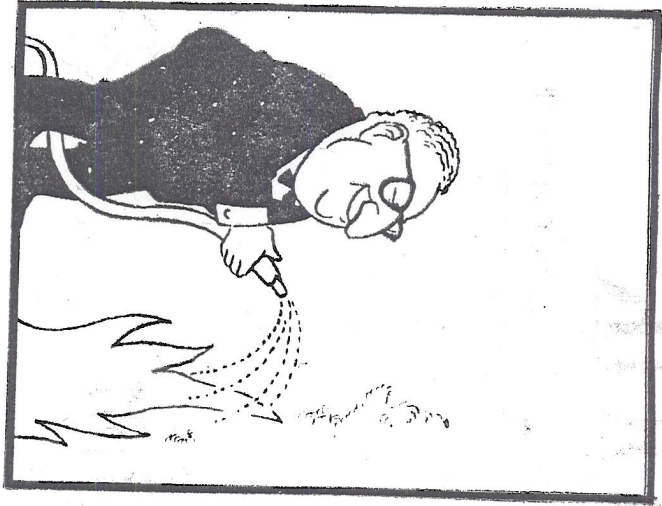
3. *Kissinger is not an ideologue.* During the Vietnam war he was often viewed as a hawk, while himself putting out hints that he hoped the war would end soon. More recently he has allowed himself to become the hero of the liberals in what they portray as a battle against Sen. Henry Jackson and the Pentagon tide which will destroy detente.

But I think a clearer picture of Kissinger would show that while his deepest personal values are conservative and authoritarian, he is ready, willing and able to subordinate any theoretical or theological point if it will give him a tactical advantage.

In 1972, for example, Kissinger first made a deal with the North Vietnamese; then failed to sell it to the South Vietnamese; told people privately that he would "cram it down Thieu's throat"; instead participated in the dreadful decision to bomb Hanoi in order, at least in part, to divert any possible presidential thoughts that he, Kissinger, had



McNelly in the Richmond News Leader



Vadillo in Siempre, Mexico



messed things up in Saigon (which in fact he had).

In this crisis, in other words, Kissinger was wholly free of any constraint based on a set of moral beliefs. To Kissinger, there was apparently no right or wrong; just get the agreement. No entrapping myths about Communists; no past commitments to our allies which we had to honor. Kissinger, the man freed from any deep convictions, or at least always ready to suspend them to gain a negotiating point, is capable of almost any deal in a negotiation. All he requires is that he can sell it at home, to his President and, as necessary, to Congress.

4. *Kissinger has a fine sense of long-range or strategic opportunities and an even better sense of short-term tactics and timing.* This is not to say that he is always right, as he would have us believe. But he has shown an ability to see great new opportunities, and capitalize on them. It is hard to visualize a more dogged, true believer like Dean Rusk moving as fast to change our relations with Egypt, or moving as far in building personal bridges to China. Kissinger's speed in a negotiation is truly unique in American history. It is based on his insight that delays can often harden positions. He said in October, 1973: "There must be understanding of the crucial importance of timing. Opportunities cannot be hoarded; once past, they are usually irretrievable." His behavior shows how deeply he means what he said.

5. *Kissinger cares about power more than anything else.* In this regard, one can fairly say, he is no different from most of Washington's leaders and would-be leaders. But in his single-minded pursuit of power he has not been the man above partisanship, the man uncontaminated by the stench of Watergate, the man who thinks only of the national interest, that he wishes us to believe he is.

His ringing threat at Salzburg that unless he got a reaffirmation of his integrity he would have to leave office was in this sense a wild act, one that one cannot conceive of any other American doing. Indeed, the only figures of recent times who one can visualize making such an outlandish gesture and getting away with it are de Gaulle and Nasser.

6. *Kissinger does not let human beings interfere with policy.* He can tell us, in a plaintive and self-serving way, that his efforts on the Mideast can prevent mothers from worrying at night about their sons. But the actual impact of his policies on the lives of people in far-off countries seems to be no more than another factor to take into account. His attitudes, privately expressed but widely reported, on such scattered tragedies as Biafra, Bangladesh, Burundi and the threat of famine seem to indicate that he does not consider the factor of human suffering the overriding one. That, in fact, is putting it gently: Some of his former associates have gone further and consider him wholly without feeling for human suffering.

This goes further than the normal and understandable fact that no one man can solve, or undertake to solve, all the world's ills. Here is a man placed in a position to do something which might reduce suffering, and he has often either done nothing or done something which increased the human problem.

7. *Kissinger is obsessively secretive.* This point is so well known by now that it may seem obvious. But it bears emphasis, because it goes to the core of trying to understand Henry Kissinger. He cannot function at only one or two levels, but simply must operate constantly at multiple levels. It is by now reasonable to conclude that in any of his greatest negotiations, when the full story is told, we will learn that there was something else, some extra level that was previously unknown. It is this quality that gives Kissinger his aura as a magician. It is also a grave long-run risk to his power and

objectives; what happens when everyone is on to his game, and—like the people closest to him—learns that while he can be admired, he cannot be trusted?

Kissinger's secretiveness is a stock joke in the State Department where, the closer one

gets to the inner group, the greater the palace intrigue. But in the end it is no laughing matter; it could well be Kissinger's greatest flaw.

These are relatively simple points; one can add to them or redefine them as one wishes. But they suggest several important conclusions about Henry Kissinger and our attitudes towards him.

First of all, we should not feel that to criticize some specific action of his is to oppose him on every action. No man in high office is all good or all bad, and although Kissinger may now have become a hero to many Americans, he is filled with flaws, has made errors and is far from a god. One can oppose Kissinger vigorously on Vietnam, or his role in wiretapping his own staff, while applauding him for the Golan Heights ceasefire. It is Kissinger himself who seeks to force us to accept him on an all-or-nothing basis, and this is foolish.

Second, he is in fact a towering Secretary of State. His accomplishments far exceed what one could reasonably expect from any one man in less than six years. He has already left his mark on the world, although it will take years to measure the full import of some of his actions. Even if some of his patchwork settlements do not hold in the long run, they must be admired as virtuoso patchwork—and usually better than nothing. Our country is clearly better off with him than without him right now, despite all the problems that his behavior poses.

Third, he is clearly an extremely difficult man, difficult to trust, difficult to work for. There is no law which says that great men have to be nice; on the contrary, in the eyes of many historians. But this does bring me to my final point.

### A Hero, Not a Model

**H**ENRY KISSINGER a national hero? Kissinger is now more than a Secretary of State, something grander and greater. Kissinger, who knows and understands this, has already begun to exploit it; now, polarization of people may be in his interests for the first time, and, whereas he previously sought to co-opt his opponents, he may now revel in the role of liberal hero, standing bravely against the forces of the military-industrial complex.

His magician's tricks are not yet played out, either in Washington or in the rest of the world. There are other settlements to make, other agreements to sign. His boundless energy and talent can still be used and undoubtedly will be.

But if he has become a hero to Americans, let us hope that he does not become a model. His style and spirit run counter to some of this nation's deep and enduring values. Perhaps in the aftermath of Vietnam we needed a diplomat who turned away from the excessive moralism of a John Foster Dulles or a Dean Rusk. In showing what could be done when released from certain moral and political blinders, Kissinger did us all a great service.

But he carries amoralism too far. In his public statements, he hedges his bets, tries to straddle both sides of the fence, as he did in his speech to the Pacem in Terris conference last October: "America cannot be true to itself without moral purpose. This country has always had a sense of mission . . . But when policy becomes excessively moralistic it may turn quixotic or dangerous. A presumed monopoly on truth obstructs negotiation and accommodation. Good results may be given up in the quest for ever elusive ideal solutions."

Kissinger has used that speech, which he has called his most important since becoming Secretary, to prove that he does understand America's moral purpose. But in context, the sentences quoted first seem like throwaway lines. The message is clearly in what follows: America must free itself from its myths.

But one man's myths may be another's guiding purpose. The dividing line cannot be defined; too much of one extreme is not a cure for the other extreme. If Kissinger had been Secretary of State for a different sort of President, things might have been very different. But the gymnasium professor's son from Furth and the scrub football player from Whittier were a perfect match; Richard Nixon's style and values also seem alien to certain central American traditions. Only in Mr. Nixon's case, in his disregard for those values, he crossed the last lines of restraint, and moved into active participation in impeachable offenses. While Kissinger was subtly emphasizing the differences between himself and the other members of Mr. Nixon's entourage, in fact, there are some real similarities. How uncomfortable did Kissinger really feel about the covert behavior of Haldeman and Ehrlichman, provided that it wasn't directed at him? How "distasteful" did Kissinger really find those activities he now deprecates but clearly was party to, such as the wiretapping of his own staff?

We may need Kissinger and men with his ability to maneuver towards compromise settlements, but we also need men and women of real leadership, able to set our sail for some worthy port, and, telling us what it is and why we are going there, rally us to the journey. The Kissingers of the world, no matter how brilliant, are never going to lead us there. So we may need them, and value them while we have them, but in the end let us not make them our new cultural heroes, and above all, let us not make them our new models.