

The Gloom Around Kissinger

By Bernard Gwertzman
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A sense of almost fatalistic gloom seemed to pervade Secretary of State Henry A. Kissinger's party yesterday.

The cause might have been fatigue, the slow pace of Egyptian-Israeli negotiations or the bad news from

Washington and elsewhere.

En route from Israel to the Saudi royal capital where Kissinger spent several hours meeting and conferring with top Saudi officials, including King Faisal, newsmen were given their most pessimistic appraisal of the over-all world situation in some time.

Some of the comments

were clearly self-serving and bolstered Kissinger's well known concerns about Congress and the erosion of American influence abroad, but newsmen were inclined to take most of them seriously as at least reflecting what Kissinger and his top aides were thinking.

Newsmen were told the following:

- The North Vietnamese have decided to launch a major attack because of the sharp congressional cuts on aid to South Vietnam. To bolster this view, Kissinger is said to have been impressed by a recent North Vietnamese article detailing this decision as well as to signs that recruits with only

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one month's training are now being sent into the South.

- If Kissinger had known in 1972-1973 that Congress would have cut back on aid to South Vietnam the way it has in the last year, he could not have in good faith negotiated the Paris cease-fire accords the way he did. He assumed, then that Saigon would get sufficient military and economic aid to help it defend itself and not be faced with shortages of ammunition, fuel and equipment.

- Cambodia's imminent fall has had an impact on the current Middle East negotiations. It has made the Israelis more cautious about accepting assurances from the United States or elsewhere. But it has also given President Hafez Assad of Syria a sense of historical optimism. He told Kissinger that he was less worried now about Israel because in the next four years Israel would lose American support just as Cambodia did.

- The Israelis have also raised concern about Iran's reconciliation with Iraq and the dropping of support for the Kurds. The Israelis ask and Kissinger is hard put to find an answer: How can Israel give up the Abu Rudeis oilfields on the basis of pledges from Iran and the United States to increase on shipments to Israel and keep them coming in time of crisis.

- Around the world, American diplomatic influence is on the decline. Portugal, Turkey, Cambodia, Vietnam and the Middle East are all troubled areas that no longer respond to American pressure and influence. The new Thai government, looking for the best deal possible for itself, is also sure to expel the remaining American forces in a short time, perhaps less than the year announced.