

Diplomacy Minus Morality

The global rout of Henry Kissinger's policies — and his attempt to disarm his own handiwork by laying it at the door of an obstreperous Congress and an unsteadfast people — calls for comment.

Kissinger has cut a great swath through our times. He has a formidable intellect and an arresting eloquence. He is possessed of an awesome drive and dedication. He is a brilliant negotiator and a commanding personality.

But he has made one great mistake. As the chief navigator of our foreign policy since 1969, he has kept the flag of American idealism deliberately lowered and has sailed the seven seas without a moral rudder. He has been willing to do what must be done to get "results," ready to make common cause with any pirate who controlled a useful ship.

If the expediency of the moment called for throwing the gentle Cambodian people into the maw of an already lost war in order to facilitate our retreat from it, or for the terror bombing of Hanoi at 11:59 of the war to disguise the surrender inherent in his peace terms, well — that's the way the game is played.

If the calculations of power politics caused America to stand before the Solzhenitsyns of the world with eyes averted while placating their oppressors, or to deceive Congress and the public as to exactly what had been done or pledged in their name, well — it isn't easy to be Bismarck.

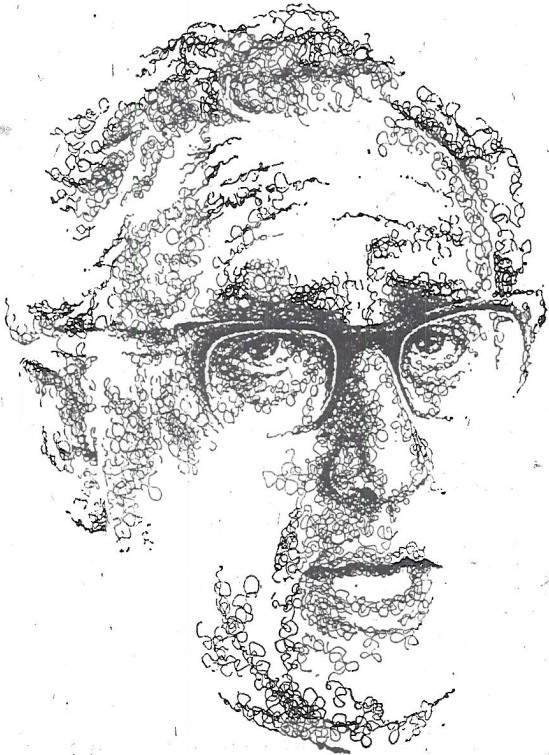
For a time, Henry Kissinger dazzled Washington. He was adept in the back-rooms at producing accords that meant different things to different signators, assiduous in building up houses of cards by ambiguities.

He practiced a diplomacy of duplicity and manipulation, putting expediency ahead of principle. He underestimated the American ideology. He forgot that there comes a time when the foreign policy of a democracy is no stronger than the people's respect for it.

One by one, the houses of cards have fallen in. Success would have permitted at least a pragmatic defense of his tactics. But where are the victories?

The Indochina debacle is merely the latest example. By 1969, the Vietnam War was lost. It was painfully evident that we could not forever defend a regime that could not defend itself.

Yet instead of facing the true reality and dismantling the war in the most humane and least costly man-



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Drawing by George Rebh for The Washington Post

ner possible, Richard Nixon and Henry Kissinger prolonged it for four years in pursuit of appearances. They had their eye on the global chess game and domestic politics.

That the Nixon-Kissinger “peace with honor” was never more than a cynical slogan, that the Paris peace accords were made only to be broken was obvious even to the Joint Chiefs. Their secret estimate was that under the Paris agreement, the Saigon regime could not survive, for the accord left large North Vietnamese forces within South Vietnam, building up for the final kill.

The Vietnam mistake was part of a pattern. Here is the dismal record, which must be understood before it can be corrected:

- Early in his regime, Kissinger found our official coldness toward South Africa and Rhodesia inconvenient and quixotic, based as it was on mere ideological considerations. He thought he could saddle the issue and, with a little manipulation, play up to both sides. His first secret tilt was toward the white supremacist nations, while he sought to placate the black nations with U.S. aid. It didn't work. Today the black Africans — almost the

whole continent — are convinced we're against them.

- During the India-Pakistan war, we claimed neutrality while tilting toward Pakistan. It was another maneuver in the chess game. Thus, we ineffectually backed the abject loser and alienated the world's largest democracy.

- In the Greek-Turkish war over Cyprus, Kissinger's passion for meddling and manipulation embroiled us to such poor effect that it cost us the enmity not of one side but of both. But Greece and Turkey had been long-time U.S. allies.

- In Latin America, Kissinger's neglect of our traditional allies has turned them against us. He was compelled to cancel a trip south of the border because he was advised secretly that his visit would cause riots in some countries.

- By the time of the Secretary's attempt to mediate the Arab-Israeli hostilities, the long pursuit of pragmatism at the expense of principle had exacted its awful price. Kissinger had compromised so many interests, had carried so much water on so many shoulders in so many parts of the world, that President Ford had to take personal charge of the Middle East negotiations.

- In Portugal, U.S. Ambassador Stuart Nash Scott tried to establish friendly relations with the new military government. He advised Washington that Portugal was not lost to the Communists, that the United States should bolster the moderates who wanted to remain in the Atlantic Alliance. Kissinger not only refused to listen but fired him for his wrongheadedness. Now Portugal has concluded a wholly free election, with 92 per cent participation. The Communists wound up with only 13 per cent of the vote. The ousted ambassador was right; Kissinger was wrong.

If Kissinger's mistakes suddenly are catching up with him, he has told friends plaintively that it isn't his fault — if the presidency had retained its authority, if the Congress had not rebelled, if the people had not flagged.

But that is the point. The foreign policy of a great democracy, if it is to endure, must be forthright and based on principle. Free men will not long shed blood or spend their treasure to support mere facades, manipulations and secret deals.

An American foreign policy that does not recognize this is built on sand.

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