

Kissinger's Confession

Henry Kissinger is eating crow. In little bits to be sure, and with such a straight face that the tough stringy meat seems to be going down smooth as tapioca.

In fact, however, the Secretary of State is systematically acknowledging past mistakes and moving to correct them. That effort says something about his plans for the future.

Perhaps the most notable confession of error centers on what is generally considered to be Kissinger's major achievement—the opening of China. The drama of that new policy tended to obscure the fact that the secrecy of Dr. Kissinger's first trip and the suddenness of the announcement disturbed American relations with several allies—especially Japan.

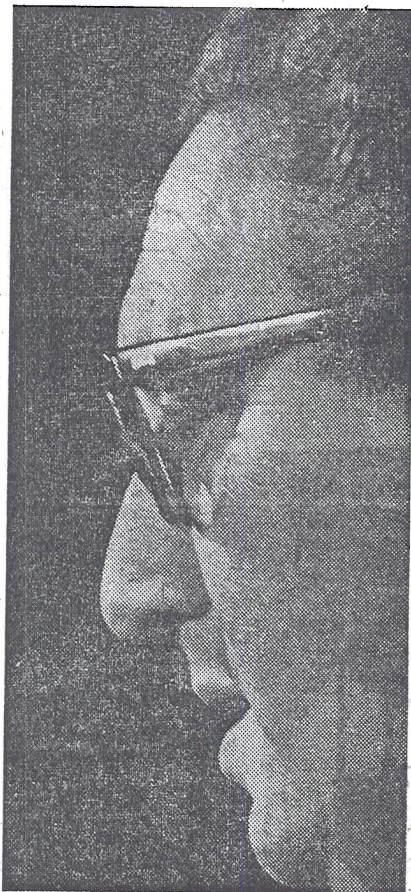
But in a speech to the Japan Society in New York the other day, Dr. Kissinger paid his debt to history. He acknowledged that "A new policy toward China in 1971" led to "painful . . . misunderstandings with Japan."

"Let us be frank," he then said of the misunderstandings. "Our own tactics contributed." Which at the very least has to mean that the secrecy of Dr. Kissinger's first Peking visit was a mistake.

The same speech included an implied disavowal of Dr. Kissinger's most marked weakness—his undervaluation of the moral and libertarian elements of foreign policy. "We have learned the important lessons from the tragedy of Vietnam," he said.

One of these was that "Outside effort can only supplement, but not create, local efforts and local will to resist." Another lesson was that the "essential underpinning" of resistance to subversion lies in "popular will and social justice."

That rare reference to "popular will and social justice" was not, this time, a mere rhetorical freebie designed to steer liberal senators away from touchy issues like wiretapping. On the contrary, it came in a review of the interrelations among Russia, China, Ja-



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—The Washington Post

pan and the United States which constitute the balance of power in Asia. The implication was that while trying to maintain the balance, the United States would not uncritically embrace the dictatorial regime of President Park in South Korea—or even the corrupt governments of President Marcos in the Philippines and Gen. Suharto in Indonesia.

Earlier, in a series of notable speeches in St. Louis, Kansas City and Paris, Dr. Kissinger had come off his old insistence that economic issues, like questions of morality and liberty,

were mere bagatelle — the small change of great power politics. Indeed, Dr. Kissinger has now become the foremost American exponent of the primacy of economic issues in foreign policy.

To the chagrin of the Departments of Treasury and Agriculture, he has been pushing for various commodity agreements to assure the regular supply of raw materials at steady and reasonable prices. Thanks to his efforts the United States, without anybody seeming to realize it, has already displaced France as the arbiter of the North-South struggle—the chief broker for any understanding between the industrialized countries and the underdeveloped nations.

To be sure, the self-transformation still has a way to go before Dr. Kissinger's most virulent critics will be satisfied. Though he has been laboring hard to establish better rapport with the Congress, he remains a suspect figure in the eyes of many senators and representatives. It is not at all clear that he can achieve his present first priority—easing the congressional proscription on all aid to Turkey.

Nor has there been a notable abatement in the qualities that cause him to run everything himself, or through a small band of trusted intimates. Still if the peace efforts in the Middle East move forward—and despite the cautious public talk, the Secretary's private estimate is that conditions are ripe—there is at least a possibility that he will send somebody else to mediate the next stages of understanding between Egypt and Israel before moving in to tie up the final accord himself.

No doubt reasons of calculation explain some of these changes. The old Kissinger style was well-fitted to President Nixon. The new style suits President Ford. But it is a rare thing to see a high official make a positive response to criticism. Considering the trouble he is taking, it seems clear that he wants to stay Secretary of State for a long time.