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Will Kissinger Topple Nixon?

By Thomas L. Hughes

Hughes, director of intelligence and research in the State Department from 1963 to 1969, is president of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace but was not speaking for the Endowment in his recent address to the Woman's National Democratic Club, excerpted here.



John Tenniel in *Punch*, March 29, 1890

"Dropping the Pilot"—William II dismisses Bismarck.

FOR MOST SOBER Americans, there are now three central subjects: the problems of national politics, the problems of world politics, and the problem of Richard Nixon. The first two sets of problems meet, interact and come together in a thousand important ways in ever-increasing intensity. Unfortunately, our present capacity to come to grips constructively with the first two sets of problems is grievously, perhaps dangerously, imperiled by the third. For his remaining days in office, it is essential to consider how to minimize the Nixon factor and attenuate the Nixon connection.

The implications of these propositions are bound to be peculiarly intense for the Secretary of State, who, more than any other man alive, now presides over the meeting of national and world politics, and at the same time symbolizes the Nixon connection.

Today few doubt that Henry Kissinger has increasingly become de facto President of the United States for foreign affairs. He and his former chief partner now face contrasting pools of deference. Mr. Nixon's pool is nearly drained. Kissinger's is mostly full, at least "while the success lasts," as Napoleon's mother was wont to say.

A Few Distinctions

IT SEEMS A millennium ago now, and not last year, when Kissinger was saying: "If anyone would ever say I didn't believe in what Nixon is doing, I would publicly dispute him. I like the President. I agree with him. We've gone through all this for three years like two men in a foxhole . . . We have no disagreement over anything central or basic. No disagreement over policy. We're too close for that . . ."

Close they may have been. But even a year ago, when both were still dizzy with success, it was possible to make some tolerable distinctions:

- Both were incurably covert, but Kissinger was charming about it.
- Both abhorred bureaucracy, but Kissinger was charming about it.
- Both abhorred bureaucracy, but Nixon was reclusive about it.
- Both engaged in doubletalk, but Kissinger was often convincing.
- Both were fiercely anti-ideological, but Nixon had recurrent relapses.
- Both jealously guarded against diffusion of power, but Kissinger dispensed balm.
- Both were inveterate manipulators, but Nixon was more transparent.
- Both insisted on extremes of loyalty, but Kissinger endeared himself to his critics.
- Both had a penchant for secrecy, but neither uniformly practiced what he preached.
- Both were deeply suspicious, but Kissinger was irrepressibly gregarious.
- Both were fixated on their role in history, but while we suspected that Kissinger wanted to write it all up, we did not yet know that Nixon wanted to take it all down.

In short, compared with the wooden primitivism of the senior partner, one couldn't help admiring the junior partner for his redeeming virtues of humor, irony and eloquence; for his sophistication, his agility and his higher level of chicanery; for the strength of his intellect, the glamor of his accent and the pace of his style. The performance itself left the spectators enthralled.



By Maxwell Silverstein

"I'm going to stay at the helm until we bring it into port."

—President Nixon to the Seafarers' Union, Nov. 26, 1973

It is possible, of course, that Kissinger is a man whose major accomplishments are over. Some of the main things that needed doing—the China breakthrough, the beginnings of detente with Moscow, the SALT treaty—were things which Mr. Nixon would have fought to keep any Democratic President from doing. They were done in 1972 under Mr. Nixon's auspices and in that sense are behind us. The China venture itself is a case study of the meeting of national and world politics. A historical coincidence at home and abroad—a willing China and a willing

Nixon—made possible something which earlier Democratic administrations could not have pulled off because neither China nor Nixon was willing.

But the explanation does not detract from the credit due, especially to Kissinger, for sizing up what was possible and doing it with flair. Those were the days when Mr. Nixon was a large part of the solution. Today it is obvious that he is a large part of the problem. His fate is to some extent in Kissinger's hands. If Kissinger should resign or be relieved, Mr. Nixon would almost certainly follow. All understand that. But a double departure is unnecessary. A single one would do.

ONE NIGHT in the mid-60's when Konrad Adenauer was still chancellor in Bonn, he had a *Herrenabend* for Dean Rusk at the Palais Schaumburg. After words over brandy when he discovered that I was responsible for analysis and research in the Staté Department, he inquired how we kept in touch with the academic world . . . with Prof. Kissinger at Harvard, for example. Adenauer allowed as how Kissinger was the most compelling academic mind he had come across in his nearly 90 years. If he had only remained a German, he might well have become chancellor—"after me, of course," said *der Alte*.

Historic analogies are always dangerous, and German-American ones particularly so. One has to be careful and not strain for similarities between the Berlin of the 1870s and the Washington of the 1970s. But even after incorporating by reference all kinds of obvious caveats, we cannot help but be enticed by a certain startling reenactment of the personality, perceptions and power position of the imperial German chancellor of 100 years ago in his latter-day admirer, our Secretary of State.

First, quite aside from the admiration which Kissinger clearly has for Bismarck, the similarities in their personal attributes would alone make the analogy nearly inescapable. Merely consider these lines from the historian, A. J. P. Taylor, in his biography of Bismarck:

"He stood outside party or class, a solitary figure following a line of his own devising. He had no colleagues, only subordinates . . . He knew nothing of internal affairs or of economics when he became prime minister . . . He slipped readily into the mistake of underrating the power of ideas, particularly the great revolutionary ideas of freedom and equality."

Even their jokes are uniquely and sympathetically evocative. Bismarck once said maliciously to the crown prince, who was a liberal: "I have sworn to observe the constitution conscientiously, but what if my conscience tells me not to observe it?" Kissinger has topped this with a contemporary version which goes: "The illegal we do immediately; the unconstitutional takes a little longer."

Second, their special sense of sincerity. One of Kissinger's contemporary academic detractors has said of him: "His sincerity is about a millimeter deep." Kissinger himself asks us to take a larger, more metaphysical view. In his own reflections in *Daedalus* five years ago on "Bismarck: The White Revolutionary," Kissinger is full of intuitive insight:

"Sincerity has meaning only in reference to a standard of truth of conduct. The root fact of Bismarck's personality, however, was his incapacity to comprehend any such standard outside his will . . . It accounts for his mastery in adapting to the requirements of the moment. It was not that Bismarck lied . . . this is much too self-conscious an act—but that he was finely attuned to the subtle currents of any environment and produced measures precisely adjusted to the need to prevail. The key to Bismarck's success was that he was always sincere."

How exactly mirrored in what Kis-

singer says about himself: "Conviction. I am always convinced of the necessity of whatever I'm doing. And people feel that, believe in it."

Third, their addiction for compensatory politics. Bismarck himself studied and wrote about the compensatory nature of politics—about how one relied upon reactionaries to carry out liberal policies, and upon liberals to carry out conservative policies. Both as Prussian prime minister and German chancellor, Bismarck's policies were as a rule most revolutionary abroad when reactionary at home, and vice versa. His domestic politics were likewise compensatory, devoted in part, as they always were, to enhancing his own indispensability as the guardian and manipulator of executive-legislative relations. Thus in the 1870s Bismarck needed a liberal Reichstag as long as he was faced with a conservative emperor. In the 1880s he prepared a Reichstag of conservatives and clericals when a liberal emperor waited in the wings.

In the meeting of national and world politics, Bismarck stood for balance and took away with one hand what he gave with the other. He was a man of many roles and many seasons. "What is an opportunist?" he once asked. "He is a man who uses the most favorable opportunity to carry through what he regards as useful and appropriate."

The unique personal role, the special sense of sincerity and the addiction for compensatory politics: these capacities and dispositions cannot fail to commend themselves to observers of Kissinger in America's current predicament. Indeed, as Kissinger looks around himself at the wreckage of the Nixon administration, it must occur to him that he has an unexampled opportunity so to conduct himself that commentators afterward will regard his deportment as a quiet but determined Bismarckian *tour de force*. No *coup de grace*, but a skillful, deliberate, elaborated operation. In part, the logic leads him where he now says he wants to go anyway—in directions which admittedly are not easy or natural ones for him—toward democracy, toward humanism, toward openness, toward consultation, toward candor, and not merely the appearances thereof.

But the logic also leads to a disengagement, however sophisticated and contrived, from his formal partner and ceremonial captain, former Lt. Cdr. Richard Nixon. In March, 1890, when Bismarck was dismissed, Punch published Tenniel's famous cartoon, "Dropping the Pilot." It showed a supercilious William II on the bridge of the ship of state as Bismarck descended over the side. In American constitutional practice, there is no impediment to another historical reenactment, this time with a reversal of roles. Especially now that the second in command is on board, and before the rest of the crew becomes mutinous, there is no reason not to keep the pilot and drop the Kaiser.

Clearly the subject is much on the latter's mind. Only recently he showed up at the Seafarers' convention to say: "You don't have to worry about me . . . jumping ship. I'm going to stay at the helm until we bring it into port." But

with this ship repeatedly running aground, the completion of the voyage itself has long been in doubt. And recently the imperiled passengers have had additional reason to ask whether and when he is at the helm.

REFER TO the thing Mr. Nixon says he is coolest about—the latest in our series of crises. Following the arrival of Brezhnev's message to Mr. Nixon on Wednesday night, Oct. 24, there apparently was a nonmeeting of the National Security Council. At any rate, of the statutory members of the NSC besides Kissinger, only one was present (the Secretary of Defense). One was upstairs (the President), one at the time did not exist (the Vice President), one was in limbo (the director of the Office of Emergency Preparedness) and one was absent (the Secretary of the Treasury). In his new form of weighted representation, Kissinger was there in two capacities (Secretary of State and national security adviser to the President).

In his press conference on Thursday noon, Oct. 25, Kissinger nevertheless said that President Nixon had called "a special meeting of the NSC" at 3 o'clock that morning to order the worldwide strategic alert. As if to reassure a skeptical public that no erratic influences from a temperamental chief executive were involved, Kissinger stated that "all the members of the National Security Council were unanimous in their recommendation as the result of a deliberation in which the President did not himself participate . . . The President had no other choice as a responsible national leader" than to follow the advice of his top advisers.

Subsequently within a 36-hour period, the American public and the world audience were treated to some bafflingly different accounts from Kissinger and Nixon over the nature, extent and seriousness of the crisis they had just been through. The incongruities in their explanations were basic, disturbing and remain unexplained.

1. What were the Soviets up to?

Kissinger on Thursday laid great stress on the differing perceptions available regarding the possibility and extent of unilateral Soviet intervention. He spoke of "ambiguities" about Soviet intentions.

But according to Mr. Nixon on Friday: "We obtained information which led us to believe that the Soviet Union was planning to send a very substantial force into the Mideast—a military force."

2. Were there threats and counter-threats?

Kissinger on Thursday was specific: "We are not talking of threats that have been made against one another."

But Mr. Nixon on Friday was equally specific, announcing that Brezhnev's note to him "was very firm and left very little to the imagination as to what he intended. And my response was also very firm and left little to the imagination of how we would react." (Mr. Nixon seemed to be telling us that brinkmanship is especially desirable among close friends.)

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3. Was there a confrontation?

Kissinger said on Thursday: "We do not consider ourselves in a confrontation with the Soviet Union . . . I want to repeat again, we do not now consider ourselves in a confrontation with the Soviet Union."

On Friday the only other member of the NSC nonmeeting of Wednesday-Thursday night, Secretary of Defense Schlesinger, agreed, saying publicly, "I think we were very far from a confrontation."

But Mr. Nixon used lurid analogies to explain matters that same day: "Mr. Brezhnev knows that the President of the United States, when he was under unmerciful assault, at the time of Cambodia, at the time of May 8 when I ordered the bombing and the mining of North Vietnam, at the time of Dec. 18—still went ahead . . . regardless of what people see and hear on television night after night . . . That is what made Mr. Brezhnev act as he did."

4. Were we in another Cuban missile crisis?

Kissinger on Thursday said no. "We are not talking of a missile crisis type of situation."

Mr. Nixon on Friday said yes. It was "the most difficult crisis we had since the Cuban missile crisis of 1962."

All of this was accompanied by that full-blown Nixonian eruption against the press, filled with more hyperbole, combativeness and concentrated personalism than ever. Altogether it was a bristling textbook violation of the Kissinger prescriptions of the day before. The differences in perception were dramatic. So was the atmospheric contrast of the frenetic Nixon performance with the proportion and the measured firmness of Kissinger's public stance—with the latter's obvious concern to take the heat out of the crisis, to preserve the framework of international dialogue, to keep open constructive options abroad and to project sentiments of cohesion and consensus, reconciliation and healing, partnership and confidence, to the Congress, the press and the public.

Kissinger's own anguish as he listened to Mr. Nixon that Friday must have been deep and mortifying. He must have seen instantly that no attentive observer of their comparative public behavior could fail to be impressed by the seriously different wave lengths on which the two men operated in an identical crisis situation in an identical time frame. These were no mere differences of tone and nuance. In significant world capitals, including Moscow, they could easily be read as a recipe for instability in crisis management.

A Growing Destabilizer

THE MEETING of national and world politics that third week of October took on other strange forms. Indeed, the Mideast crisis has repeatedly illustrated how hard it has become to separate the Nixon problem from the deservedly insistent problems of national and world politics, and what a fateful extra factor it has become.

Thus Archibald Cox was fired, according to Ronald Ziegler, because he had defied the President "at a time of serious world crisis." In the days before Elliot Richardson and William Ruckelshaus resigned, their Justice Department offices were reportedly "flooded" with distracting White House briefings

and reports about the Mideast. Gen. Haig announced that possible miscalculations by foreign leaders about the tape issue was one of the "two fundamental reasons" why the President made his "herculean effort" to achieve the Stennis compromise, and why "Sen. Ervin, at a time (of) great tension in the Mideast . . . very selflessly decided" to accept it. Schlesinger indicated that one reason for the worldwide alert was to prove that we were still able to act decisively despite what some might see as domestic weakness. Mr. Nixon himself said that "If you cut the legs off the President," our allies might "lean toward" the Soviet Union.

As long as Mr. Nixon continues in office, we can expect him to do what comes naturally: over-react in all direc-

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tions. With it will come new strains in all directions, too, including foreign policy. This country needs a President who adds, not subtracts. The Republican succession is now assured, and the President-in-waiting said at his confirmation hearing that he would keep the Secretary of State. There is nothing further that Mr. Nixon can add to the formulation and conduct of American foreign policy for the next three years which can't be done better without him. He is at once superfluous and destabilizing. For his remaining time in the White House, he has to be regarded as a foreign policy problem, not a foreign asset.

Those who are concerned about neo-isolationism and the flight from foreign policy should see Mr. Nixon's continuation in office as an insuperable obstacle to the rebuilding of an American consensus on world affairs. Those who worry about the disintegration of respect for leadership and authority in foreign policy cannot hope for recovery while he remains. Some think that those abroad who discern weakness in Washington could be tempted to take advantage. Some think that those in Washington who anticipate that perception could be tempted to take risks and perceive threats that are not there. Mr. Nixon is hardly a dispassionate element either way. Increasingly he will become a growing destabilizer of both causes and effects.

Those who intended the second Nixon administration to pursue new

foreign policy tasks in Europe and in economics know that for such tasks the tact and applied effort of many men and institutions are required. But many of both are immobilized by Mr. Nixon's holding on to office. Those who want to enlist the energies and enthusiasms of countless men and women of understanding and goodwill across America can hardly do it under the Nixon cloud.

The foreign policy of this country should no longer be required to carry the burden of a discredited chief executive. The responsible and dedicated foreign policy personalities of the government should no longer be asked to run interference for a malefactor in high office. Far from being the most persuasive reason for him to stay, for-

eign policy has become another persuasive reason for him to leave.

A Weighted Vote

IN BRIDGING OVER from the impossible present to whatever is to follow, the Kissinger role looms large. We still have a President who at each new crisis stubbornly keeps asking himself, "What would Patton have done?" Comparatively speaking, we should probably take solace that the Secretary of State keeps asking, "What would Bismarck have done?" Given such a choice, one's hopes ride with our contemporary Bismarck, a self-acknowledged genius like his 19th Century predecessor, who presumably agrees with him that genius lies in knowing when to stop. In this case, knowing when to stop *being used*.

I do not wish to be misunderstood. No one, except perhaps Mr. Nixon, is thinking about active disloyalty. What is at issue is the prospect of American officialdom's active and patriotic resistance to the predictable White House orders to enlist in the defense of the last redoubt. How can the bona fides of the foreign policy process be preserved during this interregnum? How can daylight and distance effectively be placed between his personal interest and the national interest? How can we escape from the embarrassment of Mr. Nixon's draping the national security blanket over everything from interior decorating to common crimes?

These are highly personal questions which confront federal office holders in general, but Kissinger in particular. Short or resignation or repudiation, he above all has to set his terms and be clear about them in his own mind. Surrounded by whatever temporary obfuscation he wishes, he must nevertheless consciously determine the degree to which he will remain the day-to-day legitimatizer of a regime which would be conclusively recognized as illegitimate without his continuing endorsement. Legitimacy is a key Kissingerian concept. It has meaning for him well beyond most other concepts. How fitting for Kissinger—with his special Bismarckian sincerity, with his renown gained for practicing compensatory politics in far-off places with Brezhnev, Chou En-lai and Le Duc Tho — to cast a weighted vote on such an issue!

The opportunity is here for Kissinger, the last remaining positive symbol of the Nixon connection, to put these historic capacities to use at home. Indeed he cannot *not* practice compensatory politics in contemporary Washington. Inwardly he now has to ask himself not only when to dissemble and how to maneuver, but also what to save. He will increasingly be obliged to position himself. His choices cannot much longer remain hidden. In the end he will almost certainly have to choose between Mr. Nixon and the country.

Helping History Along

IF HE CHOOSES Nixon, he can help prolong the country's agony and help sustain the current irresolution. But history may not treat Kissinger kindly for that choice.

Or Kissinger can, if he will, play the historic role of separating the national and world crises from Nixon's crisis, with that special sincerity of his helping assure his credibility to all concerned. Those not blessed with it have far less to offer. No one is more strategically placed.

Kissinger will be kidding himself if he thinks he can avoid the choice. His own cultivated sense of tragedy must tell him that he is not immortal, current press notices to the contrary notwithstanding.

The web in which he is caught is finely spun, and disengaging from that web will be hazardous. But Kissinger is not a man to be underestimated. His antennae are out, wider than ever. He has promised the Chinese continuity of American policy under future administrations. He himself has hinted that the administration's legitimacy has been weakened, referring, as he has, to "crises of authority." He has imaginatively broadened the involvement of the Congress and his connections with it. He has made some high-quality appointments at the assistant secretary level. He keeps in touch with substantial non-Nixon forces in the body politic whose cooperation will be indispensable for policy stability in what remains of this period of *Sturm und Drang*.

There is a substantial American democratic tradition to which most of us adhere. It allows free politics to flourish and lives by the faith that nothing in life is really inevitable until after it has happened.

There is another tradition, explicitly Bismarckian, which, awaiting and expecting the inevitable, hears the footsteps of God in history, and then, in the best Hegelian tradition, helps history along.