

# Kissinger Sought Help Before Trip

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In the 72 hours before his departure for the Middle East, Henry A. Kissinger sought solace and support from aides, friends and members of Congress, trying to find a way to shore up his personal integrity against charges that he had initiated a series of wiretaps.

The Secretary of State considered resigning. He considered not joining President Nixon on the trip that is to mark the new American relationship in the Middle East.

Interviews with his associates show that Kissinger was preoccupied and troubled, concerned about his own reputation and with what he saw as the potential impact on the foreign policy he was supposed to be conducting. He wanted advice and reassurance.

He spoke to many people privately. Then he went public, in the emotional outburst of his Salzburg press conference.

"A guy can only take so much," said one of his closest confidants. "He was really upset."

The secretary's deep concern with the issues of Watergate had its origin in last Thursday's Washington press conference. It was called mainly to discuss the Middle East, but he was questioned about his role in the wiretapping. He was even asked whether he had retained counsel "in preparation for a defense against a possible perjury indictment."

That question, according to one aide, was the one that really got under his skin. "It annoyed him to tears," the aide said. Describing the press conference to a friend a half-hour later, he said that more than half the questions dealt with wiretapping. "If this keeps up," he reportedly said, "I'm going to resign."

On Saturday, Kissinger saw Mike Mansfield, the majority leader of the Senate. It was at a breakfast to which Kissinger had invited the Montana Democrat the week before. "He was in some distress," Masfield recalled yesterday. "We discussed other matters, but then we got to the question of wiretapping."

Said Mansfield: "He felt it made it much more difficult for him to conduct the foreign policy of the United States as the agent of the President. He indicated . . . that it would be an impossible job to carry out that responsibility and have this other thing hanging over him . . . and that he might have to consider resigning."

"I told him not to even think of it," Mansfield recalled.

Nevertheless, Mansfield said that on Sunday Kissinger was so disturbed that he called the senator at home. "He expressed concern about the continuing attacks on his credibility and honesty and said he was considering not going with the President to the Middle East because he would be under some sort of a cloud," said Mansfield. "I told him 'Don't you dare think that way. You go; you're needed; you can be extremely helpful; the country depends on you . . .'"

Mansfield said: "I told him to roll with the punches and do what the rest of us do with criticism: to try to add another layer of skin on."

By Sunday night Kissinger was still seething. Friends who saw him at a dinner party said he was cooler, colder than usual. "I thought he was less warm and funny than usual," said

one friend. "He kept saying that this was an impossible situation, and repeating that he had not instituted the wiretapping."

That morning a story had appeared in The New York Times repeating a report that Kissinger was linked to the FBI order ending the wiretaps. The same day The Washington Post carried an editorial urging the Senate Foreign Relations Committee "to recall him and to do its best to determine whether he spoke the truth."

An aide said these articles made him feel he was being misunderstood and that he was being unfairly criticized. The aide said that since Thursday's press conference it was "pretty clear that he was upset and irritated by the line of questioning."

He was also described as "very tired" following his four weeks in the Middle East, and as being "in a highly emotional state."

When Kissinger left for Salzburg, aides were not aware that he was planning to hold a press conference. There was some discussion of a statement, but an aide said yesterday that he was probably eager to clear the air now, rather than waiting a week while he was in daily meetings throughout the Middle East that would probably not permit time for a full press conference.

When he spoke he already had in his hands the Newsweek article that was headlined, "An Ugly Blot on Mr. Clean?" which he referred to in his press conference. The daily news report had probably also brought him yesterday's New York Times editorial which said that Kissinger "seems to be vulnerable to the charge of dissembling," and which added that "sooner or later this whole dismal episode must have its full airing."

Even before these articles appeared, Kissinger was described by one confidant as feeling that he was being subjected to criticism he is in no position to answer. "He's very sensitive," this friend said, "and this was hitting below the belt." He added: "He was really upset by these innuendos and charges resulting from leaked information . . . and his hands are tied behind his back. He can't talk back about secret information . . . He's willing to take on anyone but he thinks this is unfair criticism . . ."

His friends agree that the criticism, in the words of one, "has hurt very deeply." There is the sense that Kissinger feels—although he has never expressed it—that he has done so much for the nation and is now being treated so shabbily, that he is becoming the victim of a kind of witch hunt.