

Chief Architect of Viet Peace Builds Superstar Image

By Robert C. Toth
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"That's some mind," said the Miami television repairman of Henry A. Kissinger whose picture happened to appear on the set he was adjusting.

He had come from Cuba, the repairman said, and had "all the books on Kissinger at home — you know, for my kids to read." He glanced again at the set, tapped his head and repeated: "That's some mind."

Kissinger is not exactly a folk hero, but recognition of his brilliance extends beyond the corridors of power. The year-end Gallup Poll found him the fourth most admired (by Americans) in the world. Even his irremediable critics accept the extraordinary quality of his mind as "given" before going on to compare him to Machiavelli or Dr. Strangelove.

They also charge him, as do some of his admirers, with being determined to the point of ruthlessness, egotistical to the point of arrogance, a bully with bureaucrats but a charmer with his bosses, and ultimately, that he is "amoral."

There are numerous anecdotes about Kissinger's refusal to discuss the larger right or wrong of America in Vietnam, at least when injected into geopolitics. He gets impatient and considers it irrelevant in that context.

Truth should be sought at divinity schools, he would hold, not in relations of nations. "The commitment of 500,000 Americans has settled the importance of Vietnam," he wrote before becoming President Nixon's assistant for national security affairs in 1969.

"Precisely because we are here not only to liquidate one war but because we have a larger responsibility to try to create what we hope is to be a more lasting peace," he said in 1970, "what we do in Vietnam has to be measured in terms larger than Vietnam itself."

The harshest criticisms of Kissinger — a refugee from Nazi Germany who has become a master in the art of practice of realpolitik — are largely directed at his professional behavior.

In private he can be almost shy. He is admittedly insecure in personal relations. "I have a first rate mind but a third rate intuition about people," he said. Obviously he is not a shrinking violet, but neither is he pretentious.

It is part of his crenellated personality that his dry humor is sardonic in private, sharp and witty in public. It is almost always directed at himself. He has stopped using jokes about his accent and syntax ("I give the verbs at the end and you put them where they belong") but he still quips disarmingly about his self-perceived flaws, perhaps to "confound his opponents with complete frankness," as he once wrote about Otto von Bismark.

He told his last class at Harvard, which was applauding the news of his Washington appointment, that "this is good for my meglomaniac." When John N. Mitchell, former Attorney General, called Kissinger an "egotistical maniac," Kissinger went one better. "It took me 18 years at Harvard to justify my paranoia," he said; "in Washington I did it in 18 months."

He appears supremely self-confident in public. In private he worries his fingernails compulsively. A bachelor, now 49, he shows up at many cocktail parties, yet (like Mr. Nixon) is bored by their "appalling banter." He is chronically seen with starlets but has admitted that "some of them aren't even pretty."

No one can doubt that his failed marriage (after 15 years and two charming, bright children) has left deep scars. He takes virtually all his meals in the White House, including breakfast, except when he dines or parties out. But he is never known to complain about being lonely.

He works exhaustively, often 12 and 14 hours a day. "I was not brought up to have a lot of leisure," he said. The "absence of responsibility is harder to bear" than the usually hectic days in the white house.

Kissinger has played the key role, outside Mr. Nixon himself, in all of the foreign policy successes of the administration. He has been associated with none of its domestic failures. Mr. Nixon

acknowledged, after the election, that he had chalked up "very significant successes" abroad but only "some successes and many disappointments" at home.

This takes nothing from Mr. Nixon. He gets ultimate credit for the successes, as he would get ultimate blame if the efforts had failed. There were hints in Mr. Nixon's pre-election statements of the courses he later followed.

But it was Kissinger who laid out in detail, with 90 per cent accuracy, the strategy followed and the terms of the settlement now reached on Vietnam. He can fairly be called its chief architect. Unquestionably, he was its chief negotiator, just as he was chief negotiator of the opening to China and the rapprochement with the Soviet Union, including the crucial nuclear arms agreement.

His views first appeared in a Rockefeller speech of May, 1968, calling for "de-Americanization" of the war and new U.S. tactics to cut casualties that would make the conflict, in effect, less objectionable to the American people.

Kissinger went into far greater detail in a remarkably foresighted article written in late 1968 (published January, 1969), which began with the premise that, however bad the judgment that led to U.S. involvement, it could not be lessened by "incompetence" in ending the conflict.

"Ending the war honorably is essential for the peace of the world. Any other solution may unloose forces that would complicate prospects of international order," he concluded in words that have, in essence, since come from Mr. Nixon.

How much of the tactics, as distinct from the strategy, of the negotiations were Kissinger's cannot be now known.

He predicts that historians will consider far more significant the new U.S. relations with China and the Soviet Union than the Vietnam war.

Did he then oppose Mr. Nixon's armed U.S. intrusion into Cambodia in 1970 that aborted ambassadorial-level talks between Washington and Peking?

Did he oppose the mining and bombing of Hanoi and Haiphong in April, 1972, after which he gave only 1 in 10 odds for the Moscow summit to go ahead?

And, most recently, did he oppose Mr. Nixon's Oct. 22 decision to try to get "more precise" terms from Hanoi in the peace agreement? Did he oppose the seemingly petulant decision to carpet-bomb Hanoi and Haiphong

when the Communists balked at the tougher terms and drew back from a settlement in December?

No one knows for certain Kissinger's views on these moves. Publicly he fully backed them. Privately, he has left conflicting impressions of his positions. But while he must have had doubts, his earlier writings suggest that he admired Mr. Nixon for making the hard decisions.

Kissinger never outlined publicly his ideas for rapprochement with China and Russia in the same detail that he treated Vietnam. But it would be very like him to have written such scenarios after he entered the White House, which future historians will one day discover and label "Prachtbericht" — the master report — as they did Bismark's preeminent work in the last century.

After World War II service Kissinger went to Harvard on scholarship. He did brilliantly—summa cum laude on graduation in 1950, and his Ph.D. in 1954. He expected a tenured job at Harvard but was turned down, partly because he was said to have a difficult personality, but mostly because the faculty felt he was more interested in a career in government service than at Harvard.

Kissinger's superstar status within the administration was always his clear potential. Not only had he less recognized was that he been a brilliant academic; was also an academic entrepreneur. He set up foreign policy seminars, international studies programs, defense study programs, through which he met influential officials from Washington and from abroad. He consulted often in Washing-

ton. From all this he knew the territory, and most important the people, in the U.S. government before arriving as the President's adviser.

Beyond these credentials, he had little competition. He knew far more about foreign policy than the secretaries of State or Defense. The President was inclined to be an activist, the world

was ripe for stabilizing initiatives. Kissinger was sure of an opportunity to shine.

Totally unpredictable was that this man—now slightly rotund, bespectacled, high-brow (ballet, gourmet food), 49 years old—should also be the administration's sex symbol. He finds it "amusing," his "most enjoyable burden." This swinger image is much exaggerated by the press. In Paris recently, he was reported dining with a pretty woman; ignored was the fact that her husband (an embassy official) was also along.

Kissinger now is too far out in front of all others in the administration to avoid the knives. Ultra-loyalists resent his popularity, which they feel he steals from Mr. Nixon; they have accused him of spending extra days in Paris to enhance his own prestige.

These are petty criticisms but added to a foolish interview he gave a sensationalist Italian writer, they created an atmosphere which fostered speculative stories of a split between Kissinger and the President after the

Vietnam settlement threatened to unravel in October.

But he is too clever to allow any light to show between his and the President's positions. And he is too principled—and if not that, then too anxious for a statesman's place in history—to have blatantly lied about the nearness of peace a week before the election.

With Vietnam now apparently settled, Kissinger's future will be much discussed. The odds are that after a long vacation, he will decide to stay for a couple more years at the White House.

What would he do if he left? One of his predecessors, when it was rumored that he was returning to Harvard, quipped: "What's running Harvard after you've been running the world." And in a light moment, Kissinger joked that "power is the ultimate aphrodisiac."

But Kissinger, now at the pinnacle of power, carries also the potential of tragedy. As he once wrote: "The gods sometimes punish pride by fulfilling man's wishes too completely."