



The Big Two-- How They Work

John Barkham

HENRY BRANDON'S "The Retreat of American Power" is the most persuasive explanation of the Nixon foreign policy currently available to the general reader. It is the work of the London Sunday Times Washington correspondent for more than 20 years. President Nixon has not been the darling of the U.S. press corps. Brandon, an astute, informed outsider appears to be much closer to the President and Henry Kissinger than newsmen who normally take a dim view of White House policy.

This book is an important clarifier in many ways. For one thing Brandon describes how the President and his foreign policy adviser came to meet and accept each other and how they now function as a team. Kissinger is a conceptual thinker, probably the ablest in his field. Brandon offers an in-depth exposition of Kissinger's conceptual analysis of policy problems that goes far to explain the President's foreign policy moves in his first term.

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MOREOVER the President knows he can rely on Kissinger's absolute discretion. Both relish secret diplomacy. Only a long-term friend like Brandon could have traced the course of so unlikely an association as the Nixon-Kissinger axis.

It has served both men well and, in the final outcome, probably the country as well. Kissinger's specialty as a conceptual thinker ("a quality which separates the intellectual from the politician") has provided the President with "the answers as to where he might find himself half a dozen moves from where he stood."

As Brandon outlined it, the President's reliance on Kissinger, coupled with the latter's innovative recommendations on foreign policy, constitutes an approach unparalleled in the history of the presidency. Neither Woodrow Wilson's Colonel House nor Franklin Roosevelt's Harry Hopkins possessed anything like Kissinger's conceptual approach to world affairs.

The reader will learn, too, why the President appointed his old friend, William P. Rogers, to supervise the "lethargic," tradition-bound State Department bureaucracy while Kissinger explored the President's startling initiatives. Bureaucracies are by definition apprehensive of originality or basic change. Hence while Rogers kept the State Department bureaucracy in line Kissinger short-circuited it at the President's behest. This explanation by Brandon is plausible: without question the ends — Peking and Moscow — justify the means. Where the Nixon-Kissinger axis stumbled was in backing Pakistan against India.

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WITH the perspective of a well informed Briton taking an overview of American policy, Brandon sees the U.S. as making an unavoidable retreat from power. Already, in place of the Big Two superpowers, we can see a new Big Five beginning to emerge — the U.S., the USSR, the European Community, China and Japan. For the '70s Brandon sees an era of peace as the Big Two concentrate on detente abroad and domestic problems at home. (Doubleday; \$8.95).

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