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Kissinger on Balance

By Anthony Lewis

BOSTON, Sept. 25—At his confirmation hearings a year ago, Secretary of State Kissinger was asked his view of C.I.A. covert operations. He replied in terms of American values: "I would say that our genius does not reside in clandestine activities on a broad scale." He added the caveat that he thought it would be dangerous to abolish "certain types of these activities."

Another public expression of Mr. Kissinger's views on interference in other countries was President Nixon's speech of last June 5, warning against too strong American support for the cause of Soviet Jews and dissenters. The voice was the voice of Nixon, but the hands were surely the hands of Kissinger.

"We would not welcome the intervention of other countries in our domestic affairs, and we cannot expect them to be cooperative when we seek to intervene directly in theirs. We cannot gear our foreign policy to transformation of other societies."

While opposing intervention in behalf of freedom in the Soviet Union, we now know, Mr. Kissinger presided over a program of subversion that helped turn Chile from democracy to tyranny. He did so not with his public attitude of concern for American values and respect for national sovereignty but with an arrogant assumption of the right to determine the fate of other societies. He reportedly told The Forty Committee, which controls secret activities abroad: "I don't see why we need to stand by and watch a country go Communist due to the irresponsibility of its own people."

The point of reciting the record is not to catch Henry Kissinger in some more dissembling. Anyone who cares knows by now that that is his nature. Even after the Chile caper was

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exposed, he could not resist misrepresenting its character when he urged Congressional leaders not to restrain covert operations. He is like Humpty Dumpty, who said in a rather scornful tone: "When I use a word, it means just what I chose it to mean—neither more nor less."

The need, rather, is for the country to see Mr. Kissinger whole, without stardust in his eyes. Along with his undoubted brilliance as a negotiator there come defects that are increasingly apparent and that require correction elsewhere.

Two thoughtful appraisals of the Kissinger record have just appeared. One, written for The Boston Globe, is by Richard Holbrooke, managing editor of the magazine Foreign Policy. The other, in the current Atlantic, is by Thomas L. Hughes, president of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

Mr. Holbrooke hails Mr. Kissinger's ability, calling him "the most successful diplomat in American history," but puts a critical focus on his methods.

He can maneuver effectively, Mr. Holbrooke suggests, because he operates without limits of principle or conviction. In the Vietnam negotiations, for example, he "was wholly free of any constraint based on a set of moral beliefs." Nor does he let "human beings interfere with policy." Some former associates "consider him wholly without feeling for human sufferings."

And he is "obsessively secretive." His aim to remove the constraint of what Mr. Holbrooke calls America's "natural and healthy taste for open debate," he keeps anyone else from sharing in the real work of foreign policy.

In short, the Kissinger method is to operate alone, without the restraints normally imposed on officials by principle, institutions or even law. Just the other day he told a group of Senators that his own aides considered further military aid to Turkey to be against existing law—and he indicated that he proposed to ignore the law unless explicitly ordered to obey it.

Mr. Hughes concentrates on the substantive effects of leaving everything to Henry Kissinger. This "personalism," he suggests, risks putting the whole emphasis of American foreign policy on matters that interest Mr. Kissinger—or are susceptible to his talents—but that may not deserve such dominance.

Thus the Kissinger years have put enormous weight on the idea of détente with the Soviet Union. But what if the incremental gains of détente, Mr. Hughes asks, "are mostly public relations?" Or what if the United States and Soviet Union together opt out of the hard issues that are going to be "the world's work for the rest of this century?"

It is no secret now what those deeper issues are: resources, food, energy, economics. One reason that there has been inadequate attention to them is that they have not happened to interest the man who alone makes American foreign policy. After a year of selling arms to the Persian Gulf states and parading Richard Nixon through the streets of Cairo, Mr. Kissinger has suddenly discovered that the price of Arab oil is too high. We should not have had to wait for him.

There is no visible political substitute for Secretary Kissinger. But other institutions, in Congress and the Executive, must reassert other values and other interests than his. We cannot let Mr. Kissinger alone define America's genius and the world's concerns.