

# Kissinger's Personality and Power

"I will not dignify that with a comment," said Secretary of State Henry A. Kissinger the other day when reporters asked him about a statement made by Charles W. Colson, who was a White House aide, an intimate of former President Nixon.

Colson, recently released from prison after serving part of his sentence for obstructing justice in the Watergate scandal, told a national color television audience that Nixon had once said to him that Dr. Kissinger is "really unstable at times."

Despite Colson's celebrated religious conversion, not everybody is prepared to believe him, but what will Dr. Kissinger say now that another White House figure, William Safire, quotes Nixon as sharing the view that the Secretary of State was "power crazy?"

Safire, who was Nixon's speech writer until he resigned to become a columnist for *The New York Times*, is the author of "Before the Fall," a new book published this week which gives "an inside view of the pre-Watergate White House."

Just in case anybody should doubt the account of his conversation with Nixon in the Oval Office, Safire notes that it was undoubtedly tape-recorded. So, he adds, "When this account is compared with the tape someday, it

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will hold up." My own guess is that most of the book will hold up, for Safire obviously kept meticulous notes of all he observed around the executive mansion. It is going to be a valuable source for historians.

At the time of this particular conversation, Kissinger was the President's national security adviser and William P. Rogers was secretary of state. Nixon told Safire he "was sorry about how Henry and Bill go at each other." And he added:

"Henry thinks Bill isn't very deep, and Bill thinks Henry is power-crazy." After Safire interrupted to say, "each thinks the other is an egomaniac." The former President went on to remark that "in a sense, they're both right."

Safire's book also supports Colson's statements that the public impression "that Dr. Kissinger had opposed the bombing" of Hanoi during Christmas week of 1972 was "180 degrees opposite to the facts." Safire says:

"Kissinger, who had managed to convey the impression to his media and academic friends that he was less than enthusiastic about the Christmas bombing, steadily assured his White House colleagues that such impressions were being spread by misinformed friends of his who were not privy to his thinking."

This, says Safire, was perceived as duplicity by Haldeman, who "was bitter about the way the new Richelieu could keep friends in the press while participating in decisions that brought down media wrath on Nixon."

As long as Nixon needed Dr. Kissinger as a negotiator, Safire observes, "and—more important—as a media bridge, Kissinger was safe. As soon as that need disappeared, Kissinger would be dispensed with. Except, after Watergate began to blaze, he couldn't be dispensed with."

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where Nixon began and Kissinger left off, or vice versa. Safire cites many instances of Nixon being the boss. He reports that "to the President, Henry was more deferential than any of us." By the end of 1969, he notes, "Henry had become fairly well Nixonized."

That is, "he was thoroughly disenchanted with most members of the liberal and Ivy League academic communities, though he did not say so publicly. . . . Henry was changing, gaining confidence, feeling his oats, expanding his authority, stepping on toes. Richard Nixon observed all this, shook his head admiringly and said, 'Henry plays the game hard, all right.'"

Safire flatly states that Kissinger strongly urged both the Cambodia and Laos invasions on Nixon. He also disputes the Secretary's testimony that he was a reluctant participant in the White House telephone tapping episode.

The author does not overlook the charges that Kissinger was a bully with his staff, but on this he quotes one of the staff, Winston Lord, as saying, "Considering the pressure he is under and the enormity of the problems he is coping with, who cares about temper? He's not an easy boss, but where do you get another one like him?" Where indeed?