

NYTimes

FEB. 13 1975

SEE 8-MAR-75 -
EXCER. 0260R

Mr. Kissinger's War: II

I: 10 FEB 75

By Anthony Lewis

WASHINGTON—Why is Henry Kissinger so determined to hold back the process of political change and accommodation in South Vietnam—a process that even right-wing Vietnamese want to begin? Why does he support President Thieu in his refusal to carry out the political terms of the 1973 peace agreement?

The answer goes back to the winter of 1969, when Mr. Kissinger came to Washington as President Nixon's assistant. One of the first things he did was to discuss Vietnam in a series of secret meetings with the Soviet Ambassador, Anatoly Dobrynin. Marvin and Bernard Kalb disclose the meetings in their book, "Kissinger," and report that Mr. Kissinger made "veiled threats" of tough measures against North Vietnam. But they do not indicate how tough.

Mr. Kissinger told Ambassador Dobrynin that the Nixon Administration would not hesitate to destroy North Vietnam if necessary—necessary to preserve a non-Communist government in Saigon. He made clear that this was a basic American price for détente: The Soviets would be expected to help achieve a Vietnam settlement leaving the Saigon Government in power, or at least to tolerate whatever measures the Americans used.

The Russians implicitly accepted that price. They were unsuccessful in bringing pressure on Hanoi for a settlement agreeable to Mr. Kissinger. But they did tolerate the roughest American measures of military escalation: The expansion of the war into Cambodia, the mining of Haiphong harbor, the bombing of Hanoi.

That background makes clear why the maintenance of a stanchly anti-Communist government in Saigon—and in Phnom Penh—matters so much to the Secretary of State. He has made it a symbol of manhood in his diplomacy. If we permit a change that we told the Russians we would never permit, he reasons, they will not take us seriously on any issue.

Saigon is too weak to negotiate now, Mr. Kissinger argues. In private he reportedly makes no pretense that the situation can really be turned around—that the Thieu regime can regain the military and political strength it had two years ago. He simply argues that we must hang on, preventing change in Saigon by whatever means for as long as possible.

One striking thing about the Kissinger position is how little it has to do with the wishes of the Vietnamese or the Cambodians. They must go on with a war, however destructive, because the end result of the political alternative might weaken

Henry Kissinger's diplomatic posture vis-à-vis the Soviet Union.

A second notable aspect is how the commitment to a particular outcome in Vietnam and Cambodia—an outcome attainable only by perpetual war—conflicts with the image of himself that Mr. Kissinger conveyed over the years to people who opposed the war. He made them think that he wanted to end the fighting and the American role in Indochina, but that he had to contend with hawkish elements inside the Administration.

After the invasion of Cambodia in 1970, he told some friends who urged him to resign in protest: "Suppose I went in and told the President I was resigning. He could have a heart attack and you'd have Spiro Agnew as President. Do you want that?" The necessary implication was that he personally shared their doubts about Cambodia. He did not.

There is a third striking thing about Mr. Kissinger's decision, so fateful for the people of Indochina and the United States, to make Vietnam his symbol of strength. He took the decision without consulting Congress—or even informing it of his true thinking.

He complains about legislation re-

ABROAD AT HOME

stricting his freedom of action. But Congress has obviously been driven to that by its feeling that this Secretary of State, more than any in memory, secretly commits the country to doubtful propositions. Even when Congress does set guidelines, he is adept at slithering past them. If a law limits the use of Air Force planes and personnel in Cambodia, the next thing you know planes have been "chartered" through a private company—without charge.

Resentment at slippery tactics and deception is catching up with Mr. Kissinger. It explains the remarkable speech made the other day by Senator Adlai Stevenson 3d, a mild man and centrist Democrat. He said Congress had become part of a Kissinger "personality cult, charmed at dinner parties, dazzled by the disingenuous intellect." Only now, he said, had Congress started to see "the errors of personal secret diplomacy and the dangers of liaisons with rotting totalitarian regimes."

The great mystery is why Henry Kissinger, with all the important things he had and has to do for this country, chose to make a symbol of Vietnam, that graveyard of reputations. In any event, the time has come for Congress to see that American civilization is not symbolized by endless war in Indochina.