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COMMENT

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In Defense Of Kissinger: An Aide Replies

LAWRENCE S. EAGLEBOLGER

To the Editor:

On Jan. 20 The New York Times carried on its Op-Ed Page a column by Anthony Lewis which appeared to attribute continued fighting in Indochina to one cause—an egocentric compulsion by the Secretary of State to cover up the “cynical brutality” and “monstrous futility” of our Indochina policy in order to protect his own reputation. The Secretary is described as totally insensitive to the sight of “any number of maimed human beings.” Indeed, the impression is created that singlehandedly the Secretary perpetuates this human suffering in the interest of saving himself from personal embarrassment.

In another piece by Lewis, which The Times published on Jan. 22, the reader is led to believe that Secretary Kissinger, in a recent interview, lied to Bill Moyers about the amount of humanitarian food aid planned by the United States. The article casts the Secretary as working against the allocation of a majority of food aid for humanitarian purposes. Indeed, he is pictured in the interview as “posing as a humanitarian” but actually scheming—for political purposes—to deprive the most needy countries of food.

On Feb. 3 The Times published a column by William Safire which accused the Secretary of plotting with the Soviet Ambassador to save his reputation in the face of the impending collapse of the negotiations for liberalized trade and Jewish emigration from the Soviet Union. The column implies that Secretary Kissinger falsely claimed the existence of Soviet “assurances” on expanded emigration; when the Soviets exposed this alleged lie, the Secretary schemed with their Ambassador to contrive a pretext to blame a political opponent for the failure. Again, the reader is left with the strong impression that the Secretary of State is motivated exclusively by self-interest, and that he would do anything—even approaching treason—to save face.



I am not, I know, a disinterested bystander where Henry Kissinger is concerned. I have worked closely with him for too long, and admire him too much to make any such claim. Nevertheless, I am compelled to register my strong objection to these articles, which I believe go well beyond the bounds of good journalism, not to mention good taste. The charges impugn the integrity of the Secretary of State and raise fundamental questions about his motives and his dedication to his country. Instead of challenging the objective results of his foreign policy—fair game for any critic—they attack his character.

I happen to know that these articles—ignoring for a moment their maliciousness—are factually inaccurate. It is a fact that Henry Kissinger played

a major role in ending American combat involvement in Vietnam and in securing the return of our P.O.W.'s. It is legitimate to debate the question of whether we could have ended that involvement more quickly than we did, but is it really necessary to say that a man who lost 13 members of his family in Nazi concentration camps has no feeling for human life? I think not.

It is equally a fact that the Secretary of State has worked as hard as anyone in this Government to increase humanitarian food aid to hungry nations. It is he who first proposed last year's World Food Conference, and it is he who has consistently fought within the Washington bureaucracy for a high level of U.S. food assistance. Whether he—or this country—has done enough is worthy of public discussion. A claim that he has publicly lied about his role, however, again goes beyond the limits of reasonable debate and approaches hysteria.

And finally, for Bill Safire to allege that Henry Kissinger plotted with the Soviet Ambassador to cover up the repudiation of "assurances" he had sought to negotiate at the urging of the Congress is to indulge his personal dislike at the expense of the public record. In his public testimony on Dec. 3 before the Senate Finance Committee, the Secretary fully revealed the contents, if not the existence, of the letter from Foreign Minister Gromyko which was published on Dec. 18. Indeed, in his testimony the Secretary repeatedly cautioned that the Soviet Union had made no formal commitments with respect to a liberalized emigration policy. He noted that the Soviets considered this issue an internal matter not subject to negotiation, and that any assertion of the existence of such an agreement would immediately be repudiated by the Soviet Government. He further warned of the possibility of a Soviet reaction to external pressure and extended debate in the United States on such a highly sensitive issue.

My purpose here is not to rebut

these charges in detail. Nor is it my point to stress that these columns—particularly their tone of categorical certainty—are unfair, offensive, distasteful and painful. They are. Neither do I question the right of your newspaper to criticize the actions or policies of any public official.

My point is that these articles attacked the motivation, not the actions of the Secretary of State. They impugned the loyalty and integrity of his person, and ignored the facts. Anyone is virtually helpless when similarly confronted. His only recourse, it seems, is to deny the charges on the strength of his own character, which is itself the object of the attack.

More than twenty years ago, as a student at the University of Wisconsin and a member of the Republican party, I fought Senator McCarthy because of his vicious attempt to corrupt the American political process. It will ever be to the credit of The New York Times that it, as much as any institution of the day, stood against him. Yet now, regrettably, that same great and influential newspaper is prepared to be the vehicle for attacks which bear a strong resemblance in tone, content and tactics to the sordid phenomenon it once courageously opposed.

In closing I would like to emphasize one point: It is I—and I alone—who initiated, drafted and sent this letter. Secretary Kissinger has not seen it, nor is he aware of its existence. Indeed, I waited until he had departed the country before writing it, lest there be any suspicion that I act as his agent in this matter.

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Washington, Feb. 12, 1975

The writer is executive assistant to the Secretary of State.