

NYTimes

MAY 10 1971

# The Kissinger Mystery

By ANTHONY LEWIS

LONDON, May 9—On May 8, 1970, shortly after American forces entered Cambodia, a dozen of Henry Kissinger's old colleagues at Harvard went down to Washington to talk with him. Mr. Kissinger or someone later put it about that they had threatened to keep him from returning to Harvard, which was false. What they did do was express their despair at the Administration's war policy and their bewilderment at the part played in it by a man of his intellect and experience.

At the end, Mr. Kissinger said he hoped they would all come back in a year and agree that they had been wrong. The year is up. No anniversary meeting is in fact taking place. But Mr. Kissinger hardly needs a meeting to know that his friends would still be deeply concerned, would still in effect ask him: How can you do it?

Like the President he advises, Mr. Kissinger is evidently a fundamentalist on America's duty to resist Communism in the world. In Vietnam that hard-line instinct has had to be squared with his awareness of the military difficulties there and of the war's political cost at home. The contradictory themes can be sensed in the policy.

On the one hand, American ground troops are being steadily withdrawn — a trend that Mr. Kissinger would rightly tell his friends was a great change. On the other, the war has been widened in the last year. American bombing of all four Indochinese states goes on, with the effects on civilians that we now cannot avoid knowing, and President Nixon has refused to put any limit on American military involvement.

The objective is clear enough. It is to win a political settlement even as the United States pulls out—by punishing the enemy until he gives up or makes basic political concessions to the existing Saigon Government.

Mr. Kissinger has made no secret of his personal reasons for thinking we must carry on the war in that way. They are two. One is to maintain our credibility as a world power — not to look, as the President said, like a pitiful, helpless giant. The other, with Weimar in mind, is to avoid a sense of defeat at home that could swing America disastrously to the right.

Those ends might indeed justify the attempt if there were any realistic hope of the other side giving up. But there is no such hope.

That is the burden of a brilliant analysis published recently by a former Colleague of Mr. Kissinger's, Prof. Stanley Hoffmann of Harvard. It ap-

## AT HOME ABROAD

pears in the spring issue of the new quarterly Foreign Policy. Drawing on his deep knowledge of the French experience in Algiers, Professor Hoffmann recalls us from the fantasy world of Vietnam to the realities of power.

It is "bizarre" to think that what we are doing in Vietnam will enhance our credibility in the world, Professor Hoffmann writes. For we have proved that the United States cannot finally defeat, any more than other powers can, a rebellion fed by both domestic conditions and external aid. All we can do is keep an endless and punishing war going on our own clients' territory.

The policy of endless war is just as unlikely to achieve the other objective, domestic tranquility. An extraordinary Louis Harris poll last week showed that a 2-to-1 majority of Americans think it "morally wrong" for the U.S. to be fighting in Vietnam. And practical reasons—military fears about the effect on Army morale, for example—also argue that a quick exit is more important domestically than a seemingly victorious one. The Weimar parallel is false.

The alternative to war without end, the painful one, is to admit that there has to be political accommodation in South Vietnam and that the Communists cannot be made to do all the accommodating. There must be change in Saigon.

The United States cannot properly force change. But it can stop supporting General Thieu and thus, as Professor Hoffmann says, sitting on the lid of South Vietnamese politics. It can encourage change merely by making clear to friends and enemies that we do not envisage endless war. We can do that by fixing a date for total withdrawal, or even symbolically by changing ambassadors in Saigon.

The special function of a foreign affairs expert serving in the White House is to steer a President away from wishful thinking, to make him face the hard alternatives that exist in real life. The dangerous temptation is one that President Kennedy noted with irony in some of his professional advisers, to be more political than the politicians.

Of course it is unfair to put the responsibility for any policy on an adviser rather than his principal. But this adviser has effectively taken over the Secretary of State's role on Vietnam policy, and he does not go to Capitol Hill to be questioned. It is right for old friends or others to hold Henry Kissinger to the highest standards.