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The Kissinger Story

By JAMES RESTON

Henry Kissinger has got beyond the news. He is like most of the men of power in Washington: He is going to be left to the psychological novelists.

It is easy to criticize the role President Nixon has given him as principal foreign policy adviser, negotiator and private spokesman in the White House; but leaving that aside for a moment, it is hard to deny Dr. Kissinger's obvious intelligence, unfailing discretion and ceaseless energy.

His latest secret trip to Moscow, following on his quiet and meticulous preparation of the President's mission to Peking, is only the most dramatic illustration of the confidence and power Mr. Nixon has entrusted to him. And it is a tribute to them both that this confidential relationship endures despite Kissinger's insistence on expressing his independent judgments, even when these go against the President's inclinations and decisions.

Just before the White House announced that Kissinger had been conferring for four days with Brezhnev and Gromyko in Moscow, Representative Morris K. Udall, Democrat of Arizona, made a report to the House Civil Service Committee in which he accused Mr. Nixon of building up a "palace guard" of White House advisers who shape national policy without having to answer to either the Congress or the American people.

Well, it is true, and it is hard to deny, as Representative Udall charged, that this growing system of private unaccountable power, protected by "executive privilege," goes against the spirit of separate and equal constitutional powers. Even Dr. Kissinger, who grappled with such questions as a professor at Harvard, would agree that this is a valid constitutional question.

But there are human as well as constitutional questions involved here, and

given the President's assignment, which would go to somebody else if not Kissinger, Kissinger's performance is beyond anything any other White House aide, from Roosevelt's Hopkins to Kennedy's Bundy or Johnson's Rostow, has been asked to sustain.

To master the details and complexities of the President's agenda in Peking and Moscow, to keep the summit meetings alive while American troops are in Taiwan and American bombers are over North Vietnam, to keep the fundamental differences straight and still find areas for agreement and common interest—all this is hard enough.

But Kissinger has taken on other responsibilities almost as delicate and arduous. Somehow he has managed to keep a narrow line of communication open to the President's critics in the universities, the Congress and the press. He has been loyal to the President without ignoring or evading the opposition or assuming bad faith on the part of those who oppose the war.

And this has not been easy. He has been scalded and vilified by many of his former university colleagues and even by some of his oldest friends in the university community, but he has heard them out. He has tried to get around the constitutional question and the charge that he was both powerful and unavailable by meeting privately with Chairman Fulbright of the Foreign Relations Committee and other members of the Congress and submitting to the most searching questions.

Even in the heart of these endless crises over the war and trade and monetary policy, he has found time early in the morning before breakfast or late at night to listen to the passionate anxieties of the world he lived in before he got caught up, almost by accident, in the world of White House power.

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He has been asked many times why he serves an Administration whose policies divide the nation; why use all this intelligence and energy for all this pointless misery and death? But, for all his doubts about the bombing and his yearning for unity, he does not accept the premise and goes on believing in the President's objectives.

So many ugly things have been said about all this and even thrown in his teeth: He loves power, loves all the notoriety and the secret trips in the night and the opportunity to put thought to action in the Kremlin and the Forbidden City (who wouldn't?), but through it all he has attempted many things most of his colleagues in this Administration have avoided, and rescued a respect denied others.

* All this is obviously subject to argument, beginning with Udall's question about whether even good and intelligent men should be given such power beyond reach of the Congress; but something still has to be said for Kissinger.

How he performs this delicate and dangerous role is a miracle which defies physical and intellectual endurance. He felt confident about the President's visit to Peking because he had been there and probed the quality of Chou En-lai's mind. A couple of weeks ago he was worried about the Moscow trip because he had no feeling about Brezhnev. Now, presumably, he has. But how he goes on at this pace is a mystery, and intelligent and tough as he is, maybe even a danger.

We have a Government now of men, not really of laws and accepted procedures. We have an alliance with Chou En-lai but not yet with China. But if this is the way it is to be, it is not Kissinger's fault, and he is a man. He is an instrument of the President, but he has played his role with astonishing courage, patience and skill.

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* And always, as he has said many times since he came to Washington, because he believes it is possible to act in a crisis with a divided country, but it is not possible to lead and get at the heart of the nation's problems without more trust than we have now.

** At the time of the invasion of Cambodia, two of his young men in the White House couldn't take it any longer, and not only resigned but felt that they had to explain to the press why. They stated their case but said they didn't want to be misunderstood. This was not an attack on Kissinger. They were going, but they felt it was important for him to stay and keep placing the options before the President as honestly as he always had.