

William S. White

Reality Replaces The Kissinger Myth

The de-sanctification of Henry Kissinger that now goes on is a bit hard on him, since he never sought that lofty status, but it is also a service to truth and common sense.

For the myth of Kissinger as the "real" director of foreign policies actually made strictly by a man named Nixon had about reached a point of danger to national interest. First of all, it was simply untrue, but much more important was this: The more this legend was seriously credited, especially abroad, the greater would be the quite unnecessary shock and dislocation if and when Henry Kissinger should leave the government.

Recent rumors of a Kissinger departure, for illustration, were solemnly cited by some analysts as one cause of recent weakness in the dollar's international value and even of certain gyrations on Wall Street.

How the notion of Kissinger as the indispensable man became a part of Washington folklore is quite a tale. It was a notion resting on a single reality, which is that Henry Kissinger is an able second man in foreign affairs, and on a good many sheer fictions.

Because President Nixon turned 180 degrees from his old "tough line" posture and opened his dialogues with Communist China and the Soviet Union, many observers jumped to the conclusion it simply must have been somebody else who was directing the President's thinking. Who, then, but Henry Kissinger, the authentic intellectual that indeed he was?

It was a superficially attractive theory compounded of all these elements: A glandular dislike of Mr. Nixon personally; an unshakable, emotionalized conviction that automatic "anti-communism" was the President's one and only bag of tricks intellectually; and a determination that if anybody was to have credit for easing the cold war it should be somebody other than Richard Milhous Nixon.

Underlying the estimate also was a most curious belief among many writers and other specialists on foreign affairs that elected officials, including presidents, are usually mere grubby "politicians" while appointive officials may well be "statesmen." John Kennedy and Lyndon Johnson were wryly aware of this belief—but neither was ever quite enough amused by it to allow his White House foreign policy adviser the massive kudos that so long deluged Henry Kissinger. (It should be repeated that Kissinger himself did not solicit these kudos, nor was he respon-



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sible for the fact that he became identified as a romantic "swinger" amongst the ladies of cafe society.)

Richard Nixon, a lonelier and more in-going personality than was either of his immediate predecessors, has seemed not to mind. Anyhow, if he has minded he has never indicated as much.

At all events, the build-up of Henry Kissinger, able and useful though he is, into a Kissinger that never was has now come to a jarring halt. The reason is that it turns out that he allowed or perhaps even ordered the wire tapping of some of his own National Security Council staff in trying to stop leaks of classified material.

This has been quite too much for his old idolators. They prefer to believe that bugging was unique to Mr. Nixon. It is a most naive notion, to be sure. But, then, it is also their very own; and they are not going to forgive Henry Kissinger for destroying their fantasy.

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