

Kissinger's Style: An Irritant to Europe

By FLORA LEWIS

Special to The New York Times

PARIS, Dec. 25—Henry A. Kissinger's first encounter with Europe as Secretary of State, at formal conferences, has left a new sense of his style and operating techniques among allies to whom he had promised "the year of Europe." It has been a rocky year in European-American relations, and although there have been other, greater reasons, his approach to diplomacy has clearly contributed to the irritations.

The impression that Mr. Kissinger tends to get along more easily with authoritarian and non-European leaders than with America's European partners was reinforced during his flying December.

Dealings are complicated because the allies are allies, which expect to share assumptions, and they are democracies, which find it hard to reverse themselves in secret. The British Foreign Secretary, Sir Alec Douglas-Home, reflected this key point when he warned at the start of the annual meeting of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization in Brussels that it was harder for the alliance to work out agreements than it was for the Warsaw Pact, since the members of the Soviet bloc were "told what to do." NATO has to talk things out in public, he said, with a lively sense of the need for parliamentary and public support.

Tension and Pressure

A Continental diplomat said that Mr. Kissinger's way of trying to untangle problems was to create tension and then seek solutions under pressure, instead of the more traditional allied habit of chipping away at contention until the shape of compromise emerges.

Another European diplomat, asked whether the NATO and Common Market sessions with the Secretary of State had cleared away some of the strains of suspicion, said: "Kissinger will always play with us. It's his temperament. He tries to convince us that we have to shut up and let him handle things on our behalf. But on the Middle East I think he has come to understand that we too have to have regular relations with the Arabs. Otherwise, he's all alone with them and the Russians, and even if he prefers playing alone, it could get uncomfortable."

A brief but unusual clash with the French Foreign Minister, Michel Jobert, at the Brussels meeting was illuminating to many who watched.

Mr. Jobert, like Mr. Kissinger, has a finely honed intellect and moves with careful calculation. Both friends and rivals, they enjoy matching wits on many levels simultaneously.

More Like Wrestling

Some observers likened to a chess game their argument over the effect on Europe of the recent Soviet-American agreement to prevent nuclear war. It was more like a wrestling match, with each participant groaning and snarling in public, yet taking care not to hurt the other seriously, though each was determined to pin the other to the mat.

When the match was over they rhetorically shook hands and each went off to announce, in the subtle intricacies both relish, that he was planning to wrestle again. And as Mr. Kissinger so often does, he blurred the entire encounter with an attempt at the last word. The press, he said, exaggerated the exchange, and NATO is not "the arena for a titanic confrontation."

Mr. Jobert, drawing the portrait of Mr. Kissinger through his own eyes in an interview with Radio Luxembourg, had tart praise for his good friend, whom he called "eminently intelligent."

He went on to say that the American "is a political man," adding: "He calculates as a political man. He also knows how to compromise as a political man or to take the offensive as such a man, and not to pursue it when it risks endangering his positions."

'Happy Improvisation'

Far from seeing in Mr. Kissinger the author of a grand strategy and of profound if nebulous international concepts, Mr. Jobert said that "there is in what he does every day a kind of happy improvisation, just because he wants to take part in the action."

Foreign diplomatic colleagues of the Secretary of State say they have perceived that his well-known penchant for secrecy goes far beyond mere discretion. It is an attempt to operate without strings by appearing to be doing more or less than is the actual case. To those who have read his books it comes as no surprise, for they note the stress he puts on the importance of deception in the plans of the Austrian leader Metternich to turn Europe against Napoleon.

Sometimes he admits it, and it shocks. When he was discussing the Middle East war

with a friendly foreign minister recently, the Vietnam settlement was mentioned. The foreigner later told friends the conversation went this way:

"But Vietnam wasn't much of a cease-fire."

"I know," said Mr. Kissinger, "but it could have been. I wanted to bomb the daylights out of Hanoi, but Congress wouldn't let me. That would have made it stick."

Those who were told of the exchange were inclined to take Mr. Kissinger literally. There had been visible strains between him and President Nixon in the aftermath of the bombing. Sources in the White House at the time said it was because Mr. Nixon resented Mr. Kissinger's ability to spread the impression that he had opposed the bombing and had been overruled.

After Long Negotiation

On occasion the manipulation of ambiguity has backfired. Mr. Kissinger's announced purpose for the Year of Europe was to reaffirm all that links the United States and Europe so that there could be no question of their being pulled apart by arguments of lesser importance.

But in the course of the year, long negotiations with Moscow came to fruition in the Soviet-

American declaration, made during Leonid I. Brezhnev's trip to the United States. The White House hailed it as a historic milestone.

The Europeans were dismayed. It appeared to be an understanding that could prevent the use of the American nuclear arsenal if Europe was attacked.

Some NATO delegates, visiting the United States at the time, were whisked off to San Clemente, where Mr. Kissinger explained that it was nothing of the sort — just recognition that all-out nuclear war would be intolerable and that the superpowers should restrain themselves.

Détente remained a tantalizing development until the end of October, with Washington talking it up, then down, and Europe responding with shivers of apprehension, then anticipation.

The Secretary of State's reassurances in one direction were undermined by moves in other directions, so there was sheer bewilderment when it suddenly became known that the United States had gone on global military alert to counter a Soviet threat arising from the Middle East situation. As Sir Alec Douglas-Home told NATO: "We

didn't assess these developments in the same way. It's not surprising that we didn't arrive at a common view of the Russian involvement."

The Europeans have learned not to assume that there may be more behind secret Moscow-Washington dealings than they can see, but suspicions flare from time to time, especially when Mr. Kissinger roared through the Middle East alone to prepare for the peace conference and the Russians seemed content.

Some Soothing Syrup

The Soviet Ambassador in Washington, Anatoly F. Dobrynin, recently told a visitor: "I'm the laughing third man, sitting still. Kissinger is negotiating for us too."

In the Middle East, unlike the Vietnam negotiations, a soothing side of the Kissinger technique seems to have predominated. Israeli officials have insisted that there has been no pressure on them to join the peace talks.

"Kissinger operates with promises, he explains the other side's position and what your choices are," a high official said. "There's never been a bludgeon, but we see how difficult things are."