

Joseph Alsop

Mideast:

Henry

Kissinger's

Success . . .

Who remembers the extremely recent time, when our trans-Atlantic allies used to say that it was lucky they were on hand to teach the innocent, inexperienced Americans all the subtleties of big league diplomacy?

Against this background, it seems reasonable to suggest a bit more celebration of a pure diplomatic feat by an American Secretary of State that is without any obvious parallel since Talleyrand's triumphant prestidigitation at the Congress in Vienna. As a straight negotiating success, that is the right way to describe Dr. Henry A. Kissinger's adroitly and toilsomely obtained Syrian-Israeli disengagement.

If you care anything about what this country really means, it makes the success all the more savory and pleasing to remember that the American Secretary of State in question is a German-Jewish refugee from Adolf Hitler, with a strong residual foreign accent. Barring the American-Indian cultures, after all, every American success in history has always been achieved by immigrants or their descendants.

The cheering for Secretary Kissinger has been altogether insufficient; so the foregoing is a necessary preface. But one must add that the insufficiency of cheering rather plainly stems from insufficient understanding of the exact nature of Secretary Kissinger's achievement.

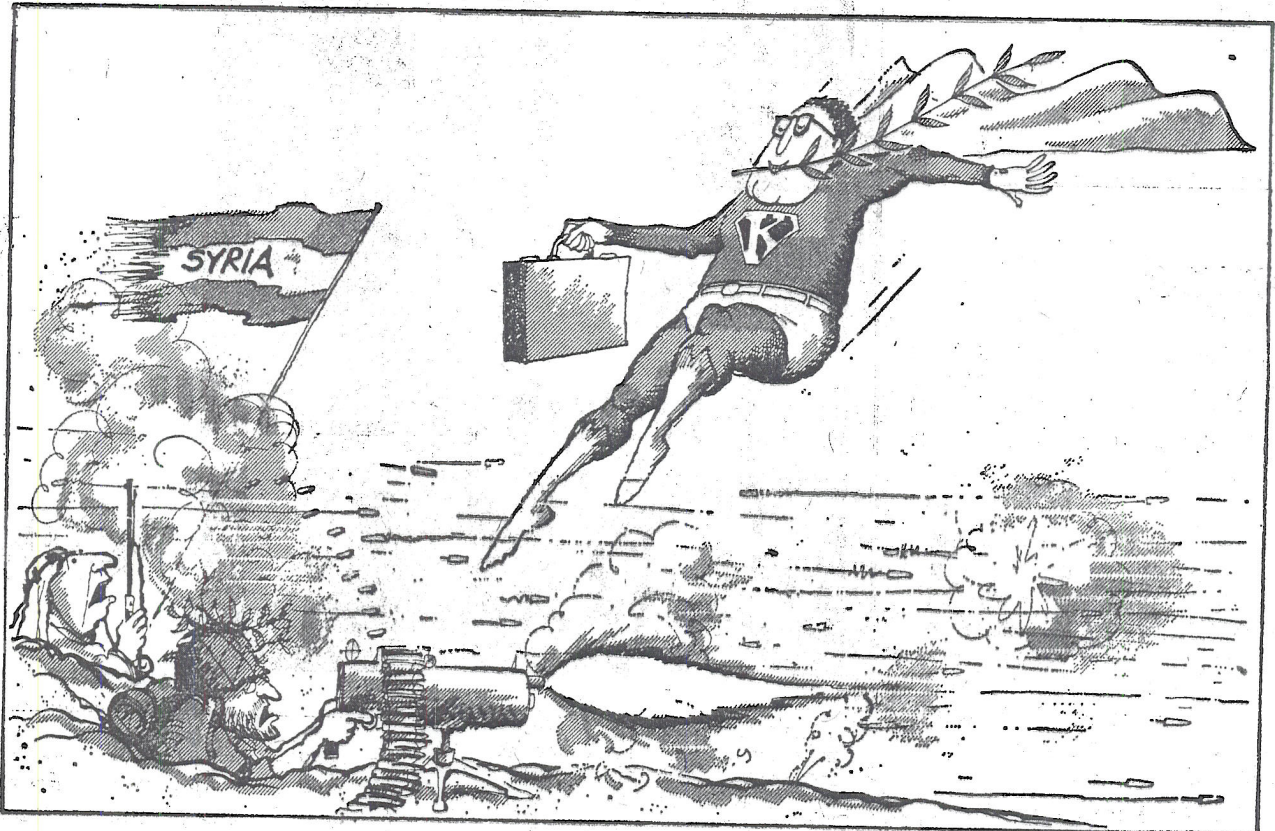
In brief, the U.S. has two vital interests and one major responsibility in the Mideast. The vital interests are the security of the world's oil tap in the Persian Gulf, and the maintenance of peace. The responsibility is the security of the state of Israel, which this country greatly helped to bring into being.

Following a rule laid down by Josef Stalin in 1946, the Soviets treated intervention in the Mideast as too dangerously provocative to the U.S. and the West until the Suez war of 1956. On that occasion, Nikita S. Khrushchev threatened physical intervention, and President Eisenhower had had to warn him off.

Nonetheless, this was the beginning of Soviet Middle Eastern intervention in all ways short of Soviet troops in battle. The Soviets even came close to putting troops into battle at least twice, when they had so many soldiers in Egypt during the "war of attrition," and again at the climax of the Yom Kippur war. Without their constant activity in the Mideast, neither the 1967 war nor the Yom Kippur war could ever have started.

In addition, there was a growing danger that few Americans and even fewer American allies ever bothered to consider. In brief, the Soviets were steadily edging closer and closer, in many different ways, to a position where they could have snatched control of the world's oil tap from the weak hands now exercising that control.

Such, then, was Secretary Kissinger's



Auth in the Philadelphia Inquirer.

er's problem, damnably dangerous and damnably complex. He had two great advantages, however. No Arab leaders, including even the Iraqis, really liked being dependent on the Kremlin or taking orders from the Kremlin's heavy-handed emissaries. In the aftermath of the Yom Kippur war, moreover, great numbers of Arabs turned away from the kind of posturing, self-dramatizing, unreal politics symbolized by the late Gamal Abdel Nasser.

Egyptian Nasserism had been the doorway, so to say, through which the Soviets had entered the Middle Eastern scene in all sorts of crucial ways. Egypt's new president, Anwar Sadat, wanted no part of Nasserism. This

created the vital opportunity for Secretary of State Kissinger.

His remarkable feat, now crowned with decisive but preliminary success in Syria, came in four installments. First, he saw the opportunity created by President Sadat's turn away from Nasserism, by his desire for total independence of the Soviets, and by his novel concern for the practical, bread-and-butter interests of Egypt and the Egyptian people. Hence Dr. Kissinger made friends with the Egyptian president, won his confidence, and convinced him there were good Western alternatives to the heavy link with the Kremlin.

Meanwhile—and second—Dr. Kis-

singer also established a unique position in Israel, as something near to an unofficial member of the cabinet. Third, he secured the Egyptian-Israeli disengagement. Fourth and finally, he has now secured the Syrian-Israeli disengagement, mainly because the tough-minded Syrian president, Hafez Assad, basically, wants to take the same road President Sadat has taken, albeit at a less rapid rate.

This total feat, because of all its effects on the Soviet Middle Eastern position, on the world oil tap's security, and on the Middle Eastern future, has worked a gigantic transformation. Its other aspects deserve a further report.

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