

Twelve Days of Bombing

Joseph Kraft

Mr. Nixon's Decision

'Compromised' Dr. Kissinger...

IS HE the little Dutch boy, finger in the dike stemming the tide of disaster? Or is he just a good German lending a cover of respectability to whatever monstrous policy President Nixon is pleased to pursue?

Those questions now have to be raised explicitly about Henry Kissinger. For since the 12 days of murder-bombing against North Vietnam, the answer is not clear.

It used to be. For most of the past four years, Dr. Kissinger has been an undoubted force for good.

A supreme example is the accord with Russia in the Strategic Arms Limitation Talks or SALT. President Nixon entered office hostile to an agreement limiting defensive missiles, or ABMs, which had been projected by the Johnson administration.

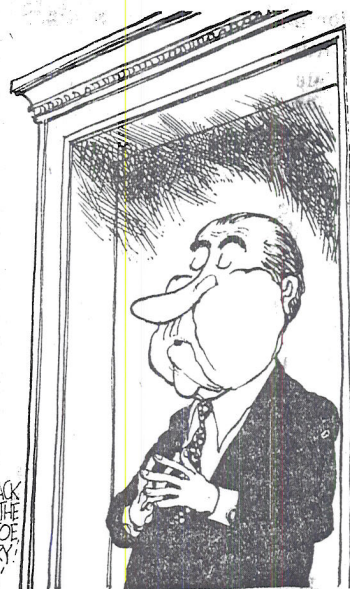
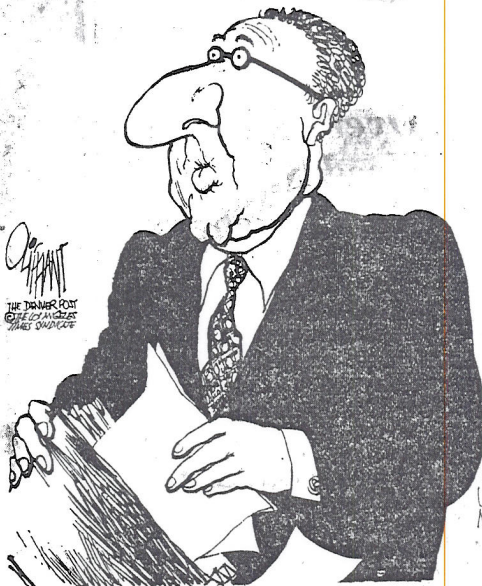
As late as January 1970, Mr. Nixon was moving toward full development of an American ABM—a step that would have precluded any limit on either offensive or defensive missiles. But Dr. Kissinger organized within the administration a process of analysis which showed that an effective ABM could not be built. By the same means he demonstrated that it would be possible to monitor any secret Soviet moves to develop a full-scale ABM system.

The upshot was not that Dr. Kissinger changed the President's mind. What he did was build a track along which the President was able to move toward what eventually became the Moscow agreements on arms limitation.

Apart from such activities, Dr. Kissinger acted as a bridge to foreign leaders not easy for President Nixon to approach. In that respect, the classic example is Premier Chou en-Lai of China.

From his first encounter with Chou, Dr. Kissinger sensed — as not many Americans could sense—how much abstract principle mattered to the Chinese Communists. On that basis he was able to cut a deal whereby this country acknowledged a set of principles that pointed to an eventual reversion of Formosa to China.

On Vietnam, Dr. Kissinger has been at all times the chief proponent inside the administration for a political settlement — "The Don Quixote," as he once put it, "of negotiations." At the



'Happy New Year, Henry... Now, Let Me Clarify What I Mean by That...'

end, when a negotiated settlement seemed possible after years of effort, Dr. Kissinger not surprisingly became euphoric. He overestimated, and overstated in public, the easiness of bringing President Nguyen Van Thieu of South Vietnam to support the agreement worked out with Hanoi.

Even so the agreement he worked out was the best one possible. It secured the return of American prisoners and gave the Saigon Government a very good shot at survival. By establishing a reconstruction program, it gave Hanoi a powerful incentive to abide by the ceasefire.

Moreover, Dr. Kissinger was not the only one who believed that peace was "at hand." The President thought so too, and said as much publicly on a pre-electoral swing through Kentucky.

Subsequently President Thieu and Ambassador Ellsworth Bunker reached the President with the argument that Hanoi was going to break the ceasefire as soon as the Americans withdrew from Vietnam. When American efforts to tighten the agreement yielded only counterclaims from Hanoi, Mr. Nixon broke off the talks. He launched the 12 days of murder-bombing to give Hanoi a foretaste of what would happen if in fact the Communists did break the ceasefire.

Dr. Kissinger may have opposed the murder-bombing. But he certainly did not put everything he had into the fight against what is probably the worst step taken by the United States in the memory of most Americans. On the contrary, several members of the Kissinger staff felt free to advocate the bombing and to knock the original

agreement worked out by Dr. Kissinger.

Furthermore, Dr. Kissinger did not organize a canvass of the rest of the government. As it turns out, there was significant opposition to the bombing inside the Defense Department, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the Central Intelligence Agency and the State Department.

Despite all this, Dr. Kissinger remains perhaps the only instrument for effective foreign policy available to President Nixon. But he has been compromised and everybody in town knows it. Unless he gets a new mandate from the President — the kind of mandate he can only get by being made Secretary of State—he should probably resign in the next year.