

# Men in the News: Negotiators

## Henry Alfred Kissinger

By ROBERT B. SEMPLE Jr.

Whatever triumph and tragedy there will be in a settlement between the contending parties in Vietnam, they belong, ultimately and properly, to President Nixon and to the leaders in Hanoi and Saigon.

Nonetheless, the very existence of an agreement will be in no small measure a tribute to the consistency, cunning and even conceit of Henry A. Kissinger, who has believed from the beginning that the war could and would end in a negotiated solution, who has worked without pause to devise the subtleties of that solution and whose towering self-assurance enabled him to push forward when others thought he must surely stumble.

The expected agreement and the 49-year-old Mr. Kissinger's role in it illuminate, without necessarily concluding, one of the more compelling pieces of theater produced by the Nixon Administration—the transformation of a relatively obscure theoretician of diplomacy, whose reputation extended little beyond the corridors of the Capital and the bookstalls of academe, into the most influential of the President's advisers, the most acrobatic of his emissaries, the most polished and persuasive of his public spokesmen and the most sought-after dinner companion in Washington—in short, a truly national figure who seemed, in the words Mr. Kissinger himself used to describe the 19th-century diplomat Metternich, "equally at home in the salon and in the cabinet."

The metamorphosis is not without traces of irony for reporters who knew Henry Kissinger at the beginning of the Nixon Administration, including a handful who caught their first glimpse of his 5-foot-9-inch, wholly unprepossessing and thoroughly pear-shaped frame at a small dinner at the Jamaica Inn in Key Biscayne, Fla., in December, 1968.

### Colorful Garb, Precise Bearing

He had been with President-elect Nixon that day. He wore a colorful sports shirt and slacks, which clashed mightily with his precise behavior and organized sentences. He seemed nervous, almost diffident, and while he talked at length of his hope to seize firm control of the decision-making process, he maintained that his major concern at the moment was to devise ways of protecting his privacy.

"I will not make the mistake my predecessors in this job made," he said. "I will not become a public advocate of this or that policy, or appear before the press or on television, because my effectiveness as a confidential adviser will be destroyed if I do."

Those hopes have yet to materialize. Mr. Kissinger went public soon enough, and his stock has been soaring ever since. He has made more news in more settings—Washington, Paris, Peking, Moscow, Hollywood—than all

the other Presidential assistants and Cabinet members combined.

While the outward manifestations of his personality—wit, intelligence, industry, courtliness and vanity—have easily been grasped, he remains curiously elusive at the core. One senses that he has planned it so all along.

"I am not a person who confides in journalists," he remarked near the end of a long, difficult and abrasive interview Dec. 30 with Oriana Fallaci, an Italian writer for the left-of-center magazine *L'Europeo*.

### 'I Shall Tell Nobody'

"Some people describe me as a tormented, mysterious person. Some people describe me as an almost cheerful type who always smiles, always laughs. Both pictures are incorrect. I am neither . . . I am . . . I shall not tell you what I am. I shall tell nobody."

One is left with the diverse and not always consistent faces he chooses to display. To David and Elizabeth, the two precocious and charming offspring of his only marriage—to Ann Fleisher, from whom he was divorced in 1964—he is a proud and affectionate father; to his rivals and equals in the bureaucracy he is an impatient and contemptuous taskmaster.

To liberals and doves on Capitol Hill especially those who adhere to the idea that the Constitution gave Congress important review powers over foreign policy Mr. Kissinger remains a shadowy Svengali insulated by the doctrine of executive privilege from public cross-examination. Yet no man among Mr. Nixon's close advisers has spent more of his energy in private debate with critics of the Vietnam war.

To the fun-and-fashion writers, "Henry's romances" have supplied welcome color to a sea of Nixon gray. At the same time there is no hint of any real substance or passion in the relationships, and Mr. Kissinger has gone to some lengths to say that women are nowhere near so meaningful to him as the time he devotes to them would suggest.

The first is his firm conviction that foreign policy, given the exigencies of the nuclear age, must be centralized in the Oval Office of the White House and in the National Security Council, which Mr. Kissinger revamped, at Mr. Nixon's express instructions, to serve the occupant of that office.

The second principle follows upon the first: that nothing must be done to undermine the credibility and authority of the President. Mr. Kissinger has applied this code most rigorously to himself. Despite attachments and allies in the press and on the campuses, and despite his wish to appear correct in their eyes, he has rarely criticized his chief, even in private, even in crisis.

It must be left to historians

—including, one hopes, the President and his national security adviser—to describe the curious symbiosis between them. It seems clear even now that their relationship rests more on professional admiration than on instinctive companionship.

Asked once whether he bore affection for Mr. Nixon, Mr. Kissinger replied with conviction that he respected him. The President spoke in kind. "Frankly, I cannot imagine what the Government would be like without you," he said in an extraordinary letter written Jan. 16, 1970, shortly after Mr. Kissinger had communicated his desire to stay in the White House. "I am grateful for what you have done, and I'm grateful that you are staying."

Trusting Mr. Kissinger in a way that he trusts few other men, Mr. Nixon has conferred on him a degree of independence—in both private and public behavior—that is not routinely granted to other subordinates. One result, familiar to those who have reported on the White House in recent years, is that Mr. Kissinger's briefings are livelier than most, made so by a kind of Teutonic humor that deliberately plays on his heavy German accent and on his position. It is the kind of humor that contrives to be at once self-deprecating and self-important.

"There cannot be a crisis next week," he remarked on one occasion. "My schedule is already full."

### He Says He Doesn't Care

An old friend once said that Mr. Kissinger is the sort of man who knows he is bright and useful but is apprehensive that others will not recognize it unless he tells them. Mr. Kissinger says that he does not care for or think about public opinion—censure or praise—but on occasion, when suitably provoked, he can engage in flights of imperious vain-glory.

One such provoker was Miss Fallaci, who asked sweetly, but with deadly intent: "Dr. Kissinger, how do you explain the incredible worship that people have for you?" The normally cautious adviser jumped at the bait. "The main reason for his popularity, he said, is that he has 'always acted alone.'"

"The Americans love this immensely," he went on. "The American loves the cowboy who leads the convoy alone on his horse, and nothing else. Perhaps not even with a gun, because he does not shoot. He acts, and that is enough, being in the right place at the right time."

Mr. Kissinger's decision to sign on with the President—a decision arrived at after a series of meetings in New York in November, 1968—caused mild surprise at the time. He was a Harvard professor, and Harvard, then as now, was not exactly festooned with Nixon loyalists. In retrospect, however, the

# at the *Private Paris Talks*



The New York Times/Mike Lien

Mr. Kissinger at his office in Washington

Nixon-Kissinger match made sense. An immediate point of departure was their joint conviction that the foreign policy machinery should be recast to coordinate the advice of the bureaucracy and consolidate policy-making in the White House. During the campaign Mr. Nixon has promised to revive the old National Security Council machinery; during the interregnum Mr. Kissinger designed the structure Mr. Nixon wanted.

That structure still defies precise description, but one statement can be made with impunity: Mr. Kissinger runs it all with perfection—the desired standard. On one occasion a hard-working junior officer submitted for inspection a chapter he had written for one of the President's annual State of the World messages. Mr. Kissinger sent it back with instructions to improve it. A second draft received the same comment, and as did a third. The aide then turned in a fourth version.

"Is this your best effort?" the boss inquired.

"Yes," the exhausted aide replied.

"Well, then"—with a smile—"this is the one I will read."

As for policy, both the President and his adviser entered the White House convinced that a combination of factors—the increasing costs of the arms race, growing public disenchantment with overseas involvement, the emergence of new centers of power around the

world—had made the old rivalry between the United States and the Soviet Union at once increasingly damaging and faintly obsolete.

Mr. Nixon, for his part, had pledged at the Republican Convention in 1968 to seek an era of negotiation rather than confrontation with Moscow. Mr. Kissinger, meanwhile, had declared, and would continue to say in countless background sessions with reporters, that President Kennedy's grand conception of America as the defender of freedom anywhere was at best romantic and at worst insupportable, given the devastating legacy of the Vietnam war.

### 'Elegant Bugout' Opposed

Still another point of departure was the belief shared by the President and his adviser that if the war in Vietnam was to be liquidated, it ought to be done in a way that enhanced rather than threatened the opportunity to build a new structure of peace that both men sensed was a hand.

Domestic considerations foreclosed escalation of the war or even maintenance of inherited levels. At the same time, however, "precipitate withdrawal," "undifferentiated retreat" or an "elegant bugout"—three formulations by Mr. Kissinger to describe unilateral withdrawal by the United States—would, he argued, weaken its honor and cripple its power to bargain with its allies or, more important, its cold-war enemies.

"A great deal of the peace

and stability [in the world] depends on the confidence other people have in the American promise and in the American performance," he told a group of editors in Chicago in September, 1970. "If the United States utterly fails in something that it has undertaken with so much effort, it is bound to affect the judgment of other countries as to the degree to which the United States can be significant in their areas."

Finally, the President and his adviser persuaded themselves that not only American credibility overseas but also the stability of American society depended in no small measure on the manner in which a war that required a staggering investment in men and money was brought to a close. Mr. Kissinger, no less than Mr. Nixon, sought an ending that could be accepted as redeeming the sacrifice.

### Acceptance of the Peace

"The big intangible," he said, at a White House briefing in December, 1969, "is not only whether there will be public acceptance of the war but also whether there will be public acceptance of the peace. Anybody can end the war. Our problem is to keep the society together."

"If confidence in [the President] and in all institutions is systematically destroyed," Mr. Kissinger remarked on another occasion, "we will turn into a group that has nothing left but a physical test of strength, and the only outcome of this is Caesarism. The very people who shout 'power to the people' are not going to be the people who will take over this country if it turns into a test of strength. Upper-middle-class college kids will not take this country over. Some more primitive and elemental force will do that if it happens."

Some observers have traced Henry Alfred Kissinger's announced preoccupation with Caesarism to his troubled and turbulent youth in Germany, where he was born May 27, 1923, in the small Franconian city of Fürth, the son of respected middle-class Jewish parents. His childhood coincided almost precisely with the humiliation of the Weimar Republic and the rise of Nazism. Mr. Kissinger and his younger brother, Walter, were compelled to attend an all-Jewish school; their father, a professor, was dismissed from the school system.

Those who have attempted a psychohistory of Mr. Kissinger believe that he fears Caesarism in large part because he saw so much of it as a youth. He says he does not remember much about his early days and, in a conversation with a reporter last year, he asserted emphatically that his childhood was not "a key to anything—the political persecutions in my childhood are not what control my life."

If Mr. Kissinger gives credit for what he is and where he is to anyone or anything, it is to the happy

# on the Vietnam War

years at Harvard, to the men who influenced him, to the philosophers he studied and to the 19th-century balance-of-power diplomats, principally Castlereagh, Metternich and Bismarck, about whom he wrote. Again, however, Mr. Kissinger resists and resents direct comparisons.

## A Question for Outsiders

"What was helpful," he asserted in a recent interview, "was watching Metternich identify the problems and then try to devise a consensus of just arrangements, a proper balancing of forces. But this only tells you what factors to look for; it does not tell you how to apply them."

What has been Mr. Kissinger's special contribution to Nixon policy? It is not an easy question. Since the only policies that he will discuss and, invariably, defend are the President's announced policies, it is the historians, eyewitnesses and participants on whom the ordinary observer must rely to identify and track each one's quarrels with and contributions to the other.

Nevertheless, it is hard to believe that Mr. Nixon's record in foreign affairs would have been as successful as it has without Mr. Kissinger to carry it through to concrete agreements in private and to define it in public.

Beyond that, the whole effort to achieve a negotiated solution might conceivably have faltered without his patient conviction that, in time, a combination of pressures would create—to borrow his words—the "objective conditions" that would make the notion of settling the war "attractive" to the North Vietnamese.

That is not to say that Mr. Nixon and Mr. Kissinger created the conditions by themselves. It is by no means certain that the fierce pressures generated in Washington—the overtures to Moscow and Peking, the strengthening of Saigon, the costly bombing, the Cambodian campaign, the opportunities for political advantage offered to Hanoi in the agreement itself—were decisive. The damage inflicted on North Vietnam before Mr. Nixon came to office, as well as accidents of timing—the American elections, for example—may have meant just as much. What can be said is that Mr. Kissinger persisted in his belief that things would fall into place someday.

## Sustaining a Vision

Moreover, he somehow managed, despite disappointments and miscalculations, to sustain a vision of what the final components of an agreement might be. Even before he joined Mr. Nixon he wrote in *Foreign Affairs* of the possibility that a mixed commission composed of the warring elements might be established to preside over a final political settlement. In a briefing in San Clemente during the summer of 1969, shortly after Mr. Nixon had announced the first troop

withdrawals, Mr. Kissinger sketched a rough solution in which the contending parties would be given political control over areas in which they exercised military authority. He spoke again of such an arrangement in San Clemente in April, 1970.

"Any realistic person must recognize," he said then, "that neither side is going to be willing to give up at the conference table what it was not willing to give up on the battlefield. The best agreements are those which everybody has a stake in maintaining. Therefore, no one is going to ask the other side to agree to a political settlement that leads to its complete destruction."

What of Mr. Kissinger's future? He sees at least three major challenges confronting him if he remains through the second term or confronting his successors if, as is widely believed here, he decides to leave.

The first challenge, he noted in the interview, would be to seek still better relationships with the Russians and the Chinese, to move beyond the ceremonial triumphs of summit diplomacy to concrete agreements. "We have put up some foundations," he said, "and now a structure has to be built. The task will not be easy."

## More Difficult Problems

The second challenge will be to rebuild relationships with America's friends and economic competitors, notably in Europe and Japan. "What's ahead will in many ways be more difficult than breaking new ground with the Soviets and Communist Chinese," Mr. Kissinger said. "The risks of competition are small and the rewards for nationalist intransigence very high. What must be done is to build a political framework with the allies in which economic relationships no longer produce the tensions they have in the past. It is a process, however, that does not lend itself to drama."

The third challenge is to provide for Mr. Kissinger's own succession. As others have noted, his "grand solo performance" on the diplomatic stage has created grave risks, discouraging new talent.

Mr. Kissinger seems to sense the danger. Asked in the interview to produce a single convincing reason for staying in his present job after achieving a settlement in Vietnam, he said nothing but marched to his bookcase and handed a visitor his monograph on Bismarck. One reads:

"A system which requires a great man in each generation sets itself an almost insurmountable challenge, if only because a great man tends to stunt the emergence of strong personalities. When the novelty of Bismarck's tactics had worn off and the originality of his conception came to be taken for granted, lesser men strove to operate his system while lacking his sure touch and almost artistic sensitivity."