

A View of Henry Kissinger Riding High

The achievement of a negotiated settlement in the Viet Nam War is a personal triumph for Henry Kissinger, the most brilliant and fascinating figure in the Nixon Administration. An avid Kissinger watcher ever since their days at Harvard, TIME Diplomatic Editor Jerrold Schecter offers the following assessment:

HENRY KISSINGER is back on top now, his darkest days behind him. They occurred just after his celebrated comment in October that "peace is at hand." He became the victim of personal attacks then, with widespread rumors that his boss, President Nixon, was unhappy with his performance. But it was not the first time that Kissinger had found it difficult to be his own man and Richard Nixon's man at the same time. Doggedly carrying on what Washington pundits called "three-way negotiations—with Hanoi, Saigon and Nixon," Kissinger became a driven diplomat. Toward the end, his usual gentle, self-deprecating jokes took on wild flights of black humor. But he persevered, often making tactical compromises, always following his maxim that policy depends on calculation, not emotion.

The job of negotiation was grueling. The Paris talks required interminable translations, irksome haggling over tiny points, lengthy reports to the President, late-night preparations for the next day's session.

Then came the final breakthroughs, and Kissinger's White House stock

soared again. Nixon obviously needs him, and after a well-earned vacation, he is expected to continue on the job for anywhere from six to 18 more months. He does not plan to return to his Harvard teaching post.

Despite his playboy image, Kissinger remains in private a lonely man, who often turns to a quip when a question of substance touches him too deeply. Charming when he wants to be, he nevertheless harbors an intellectual ferocity that is both ruthless and stimulating. While Nixon has always made the key foreign policy decisions, it is primarily Kissinger who has elaborated the grand design in global relationships—a design based on a balance of power among all the major nations of both East and West—that so intrigues the President.

Now Kissinger is satiated by the attempts to unravel the complexities of the Viet Nam War, which has demanded so much of his energy and his psyche for four years. If peace develops, he may go to Hanoi in the spring to discuss postwar reconstruction.

Kissinger's skill has been in keeping his options open and never providing an exact account of where he stood on an issue. He plays the press and the calculated news leak with great ability, usually to serve his current negotiating or power needs. He strives to maintain his credibility with the Eastern establishment even while serving Nixon. Thus, when asked to explain the effect of the December B-52 bombing upon

North Vietnamese motives, he declined, but added with seeming flippancy: "I have too much trouble analyzing our own." Here was Kissinger, who fully supported the President, cleverly suggesting that he should not be blamed for the bombing since he might not have been for it himself. But Kissinger's openness, as well as his high visibility, has taken its toll. His dark days of December removed his aura of invincibility. Quoting the words of a historic leader he admires, Germany's Otto von Bismarck, Kissinger might have been thinking of himself. Said Bismarck: "No one eats with impunity from the tree of immortality."

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KISSINGER EN ROUTE TO PARIS