

The Virtuoso

By William V. Shannon

WASHINGTON, Aug. 27—The nomination of Henry Kissinger as Secretary of State enables Mr. Nixon to hold out to his critics the pretense of reform.

After four years of ruthless war, secret bombing and false reports, of shameless deceit of ordinary citizens and open contempt for the constitutional authority of Congress, of crafty manipulation of the press and wire tapping of his own staff, after all these brutalities, illegalities and deceptions, Mr. Nixon now suggests that he had found a new Secretary of State who will conduct a foreign policy founded upon democratic candor and Congressional cooperation.

But who has been Mr. Nixon's closest confidant in compiling this foreign policy record? The same Mr. Kissinger. It is some rough measure of Mr. Kissinger's fondness for power and his deep cynicism about how power is obtained and wielded that he should lend himself to this mockery. It is a very good measure of our credulity as citizens if we passively accept this latest Nixonian deception.

Mr. Kissinger's energy, intelligence, practical shrewdness and worldly charm are not in doubt. But, leaving aside the charm, the same qualities belong to President Nixon. Yet they have only served to bring the nation to its present constitutional and moral crisis. What is lacking in both the President and his chief foreign policy adviser are ethical restraint in the exercise of power and innate respect for constitutional order. There is no reason to believe that the Nixon-Kissinger operation will be any different in the next four years than it has been in the last four.

Despite rosy rumors now being floated, the State Department will remain a depressed area. Wistful hopes in this regard clash with three known facts. Mr. Kissinger is an intellectual elitist. He is a superlatively bad organizer who has had difficulties running his small National Security Council staff. He covets power and knows that in a bureaucracy, knowledge is power. These facts suggest that he will surround himself with a small, trusted staff, spend a lot of time at the White House making sure he does not lose the President's ear, and most of the State Department will remain as ignorant and uninvolved in high policy as it is now.

Mr. Kissinger's relations with the press are not to be affected by his change of title. He has already demonstrated that he can dominate a press conference and can lunch with a correspondent, banter witticisms, feed him a self-serving mixture of true tidbits and misleading hints, and wiretap him all in the same day. But reporting is an intellectually dangerous trade, and reporters are accustomed to being used by their sources just as they strive to use them.

More serious is Mr. Kissinger's

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manipulation of the Senate, for Senators, unlike correspondents, do not report on power; they are intended by the Constitution to share in it. Where key Senators are involved, Mr. Kissinger has already shown himself the master of the confidential chat, the urgent Sunday morning telephone call, the whispered confidence. If he becomes Secretary, he can be expected to intensify his skilled efforts to get leading Senators to trade their better judgment for the dubious satisfaction of being "insiders."

Before Mr. Kissinger is confirmed, however, the Senate Foreign Relations Committee has a duty to ask him some searching questions. The most urgent queries are not about executive privilege. Members of Congress need not worry about Mr. Kissinger invoking it. Where he is concerned, they run a greater risk from what the Irish regard as the most artful kind of silence—an excess of volubility.

The Senate, recalling this Administration's duplicitous conduct during the India-Pakistan war, might well explore with Mr. Kissinger to what extent he thinks the Government should profess to its own people that it is neutral in a foreign war when, in fact, it is "tilting" to one side.

In the light of this Administration's secret bombing and subsequent "incursion" into Cambodia, the Senate should find out if Mr. Kissinger thinks there are any limits to the President's capacity to carry on warlike activities.

Recalling that David Young, the deputy head of the White House "plumbers," was previously Mr. Kissinger's appointment secretary and trusted aide, the Senate could ask whether Mr. Kissinger received any information as a result of the plumbers' operations. What knowledge does he have of other illegal activities since 1969? What part did he play in formulating the Administration's revision of the Federal Criminal Code, a revision that would have made it a crime for any Government employe to give or any newspaperman to receive a Government document, classified or unclassified?

The Senate has a duty to try to contain the Nixon-Kissinger operation within constitutional bounds. In the pursuit of that stern duty, individual Senators must keep their distance and not allow their vanity or sense of self-importance to be played upon the way a virtuoso plays a violin.