



Dazzling Diplomacy Gets Little Notice

— Joseph Alsop

AT THE MOMENT, this city is Water-gate-besotted to the point of being lunatic. A senatorial announcement that the President is far from a nice man — surely an obvious fact — engages universal and passionate attention. Meanwhile the promise of this century's most dazzling diplomatic feat is getting almost zero attention.

For the few who are still sane, however, it is still worth noting that Dr. Henry A. Kissinger's peripatetic negotiations in the Middle East are much nearer to success than has appeared on the surface. If they succeed, moreover, this will be an unprecedented triumph of long-headed diplomacy — and by an American secretary of state, at that.

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EVEN THE NATURE of the promised feat is not as yet grasped in Washington's political community. On one condition, in brief, Egypt, the key nation of the whole Middle East, will soon execute a decisive reversal of alliances.

That means a final break in the long-standing Egyptian ties to Moscow. That further means Egypt's forming much closer ties with the United States. That even means Egypt's getting arms from this country instead of from the Soviet Union, with the help of the Saudi Arabians and the Kuwaitis, who will foot the bill for Egyptian rearmament from western sources.

These will not be trifling developments.

If they take place, they will be world-changing developments. Moreover, they are solely dependent on Kissinger's organizing some kind of mutual disengagement by the Syrians and the Israelis. This is the condition that Egypt's President Anwar El-Sadat is waiting to see fulfilled.

Fulfillment of Sadat's condition is also more likely than anyone realizes for several different reasons. To begin with, Kissinger has a shrewd habit of stressing the difficulties to be surmounted, whenever he hopes to achieve something really major. Thus the reports from the negotiating front have been unduly somber.

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IT IS BECOMING more and more probable with every day that passes, that the Soviets lack the needed assets in Damascus to do what they desperately long to do: This is to put a spoke the size of eight railroad ties in the wheel of Kissinger's diplomacy. The Soviets would have those assets, to be sure, if they were willing to take the ultimate risks.

But the Moscow leaders have apparently decided they cannot promise the Syrians direct and open Soviet military support in a renewed war against Israel. Thus the balance in Damascus more and more favors President Sadat's chief Syrian friend, President Hafez Assad. These are the facts that lie behind the mysterious but bland communiqués issued after Kissinger's two meetings with Soviet Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko.