

By Anthony Lewis

LONDON, June 12 — Henry Kissinger's unique place in world politics was indicated plainly enough by the British treatment of his resignation threat. It made banner headlines even in the tabloids. The Guardian doubtless reflected informed opinion when it said his departure would be "a sad day."

His extraordinary position has its heavy burdens. For months Mr. Kissinger has conducted the foreign policy of a great power in the virtual absence of political leadership. He spent exhausting weeks successfully negotiating in one of the most impossible situations on earth, the Middle East. He might well feel, after all that, that the press was sharper than a serpent's tooth to question him again about wiretapping.

But sympathy stops there. Mr. Kissinger has had ample glory from his office, and less criticism than many Secretaries of State. His threat of resignation was calculated to arouse alarm and support for him, especially in Congress, and it did. But there are questions that will not go away: questions about integrity, civility and respect for the democratic process.

The immediate issue is whether Mr. Kissinger was truthful in denying to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee that he had "initiated" or "recommended" the wiretapping of seventeen White House colleagues and reporters starting in 1969. But it is not just a verbal quibble.

At his confirmation hearings the Secretary sought to give the impression that he had had only a remote relationship to that tapping. The committee showed no desire to pursue the matter. But evidence has emerged since then to suggest that he was much more

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centrally involved in the tapping episode.

In his angry press conference at Salzburg he said it was a "fact" that "the wiretaps in question were legal." Many legal scholars would disagree. The Supreme Court unanimously rejected the argument that the President has inherent power to use taps against domestic organizations thought to be threatening the country's security. Would the Court have found such a power to tap, say, journalists, without express Congressional authorization and without court orders?

It is really more a question of decency, of civility, than of law. Mr. Kissinger says now that he finds wiretapping "distasteful," but some who observed him first-hand in the White House noticed no great qualms about such surreptitious operations.

Try to imagine the great Republican Secretaries of State of the past—Charles Evans Hughes, or Henry Stimson—standing still for the wiretapping of their associates. No one would have dared make such a suggestion to those men. Doubt remains that Mr. Kissinger really perceives how nasty it is to initiate or condone spying on one's own colleagues and friends.

When Mr. Kissinger complains of being persecuted, of suffering attacks on his honor, it is somewhat reminiscent of President Nixon seeking sympathy for his "difficult" decision to bomb Hanoi at Christmas, 1972. Sympathy should be saved for the victims. In this case they were honorable public servants and journalists, and their wives and children.

Unlike the President, the Secretary of State evidently does have some-

thing nagging at his conscience. He has come back to the wiretapping question again and again, not only in the remarkable Salzburg performance but in private conversations. How much pain might have been avoided if he had been candid with the Senate in the first place, if he had accepted a share of responsibility for his abuse of power.

The difficulty is that Henry Kissinger may not see any abuse. For the wiretap episode is closely related to his whole view of government power, who should exercise it and how.

What led to this wiretapping was a story disclosing that the United States was secretly bombing Cambodia. Mr. Kissinger was furious at the disclosure. And the premise of his fury was that the President of the United States should have power to bomb another country without informing, much less consulting, Congress or the public.

That view of power fits some systems of government; it worked well for Bismarck up to a point. But as we learned so painfully in Vietnam, the secret manipulation of power does not suit our constitutional democracy.

Henry Kissinger has always wanted to operate alone—to be the lone horseman, as he once put it. Some of his resentment that boiled up in Salzburg may relate not only to the wiretapping issue but to doubts thrown recently on the honor and effectiveness of his one-man performance in the Vietnam negotiations.

To ask him to accept the restraints and inconveniences of our constitutionalism is to ask a great deal. But there is no alternative. That is what Watergate is all about; The end does not justify the means. Henry Kissinger will still this disturbance only when he accepts that he, like others, must live by the rules.