

# Kissinger and the Brothers Kalb

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by Roger Morris

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*Our thanks go first to Henry A. Kissinger, who, as an historian as well as a statesman, understands the critical importance of primary sourcing . . . . He appreciates the difference between journalism and history, as we do.*

from the "Acknowledgements"  
of *Kissinger*\*

Indeed. Written by two veteran diplomatic correspondents, obviously the stuff of "long interviews" with the subject and his few associates who also *know* the story, this is a vintage Washington insider's book on American foreign policy. And true to its genre, it is very disappointing.

There are occasional tidbits of novel information in *Kissinger*, but they are introduced only to be dropped

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and left, maddeningly, without analysis or elaboration. More often its 549 pages are simply banal, strewn with the trivia of "Henry's" travelogs. The book is yet another symptom of the absence of investigative reporting in the most dangerous area of public policy. It even seems a disservice (no doubt inadvertent) to Kissinger himself, who is both more human and less disingenuous than the Kalbs portray him as being.

In a sense, the best passage in *Kissinger* is its brief introduction, a somewhat reflective overview of the remarkable man and his mixed record. The respite is short-lived. Too soon we plunge into that press corps naturalism that has so long passed for (in the words of the Book-of-the-Month Club's paean to *Kissinger*) "a rich knowledge of contemporary history." There are the endless comings and

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\**Kissinger*. Marvin Kalb, Bernard Kalb. Little, Brown. \$12.50.

goings of sleek blue and white jets, the inevitable speedings of black limousines, the knowing description of secret rendezvous points (oh, yes, the reader sees, *Henry* must have told them). And, of course, we hear the intimate words of the mighty—not to tell us much, but just to assure us that we did not miss anything. Did you know Brezhnev plucks his eyebrows? “Do I look brutal?” he asks, and we are witnesses to history. To make matters worse, most of this is written in a breathless, admiring narrative reminiscent of one’s first literary encounters with historic personalities: *Meriwether Lewis, Boy Explorer*.

But the major flaws of *Kissinger* lie in substance rather than style, in what the book might have been had the talent and experience of the Kalbs (both are veteran television correspondents) broken free of the conventions of diplomatic journalism. *Kissinger* observes one of the primary laws governing the media’s coverage of “Henry”: ignore or dismiss what he ignores and dismisses. So while this book, ostensibly a “report on one man and his central role in the history of our time,” does follow Kissinger through his exploits in Paris, Hanoi, and Moscow, it says almost nothing about many of the other crucial and ominous foreign policy events of the past five years—the alienation of Japan, the collapse of the dollar and world inflation, or the development of the international food crisis that threatens unprecedented mass famine this autumn.

Then there are the *lesser* issues like the Nixon military assistance policies, the U. S. role in the overthrow of the Allende regime in Chile (“We can’t let a country go Marxist,” Kissinger reportedly told a secret White House meeting on clandestine operations, “just because its people are irresponsible”), or policies toward human rights outrages from Brazil to Burundi. These are not Kissinger stories, of course. No sleek jets or disarming jokes to the press here. But the other equally “inside” realities of world

politics in “our time” are involved—unemployment, hungry and sick children, tortured prisoners, and the corporate corruption of international relations. The Kalbs even spare us the seamier side of the items that Kissinger does talk about. We are told, in part, how Kissinger deals with General Thieu or Le Duc Tho, but are left to guess about how he reacted to the My Lai investigation or what he thought of the Tiger Cages.

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### Quick Glimpses

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If some subjects are unmentionable, many that *are* mentioned are tossed into *Kissinger* with cryptic brevity. And these almost stories, begging to be told, could have been worth the price of passage. There is confirmation, for example, that Melvin Laird and Kissinger fought “like two tough tigers” over Vietnam, the cost of weapons, and the 1971 Indo-Pakistani war. Yet, incredibly, there is no analysis by the Kalbs of the substance and course of that fateful debate, which, on those subjects alone, involved millions of lives and billions of dollars. Whatever the issues, it was a revealing relationship, redolent of the trust and honor among the nation’s highest officials now immortalized in the presidential tapes. The Kalbs do let us know that Henry’s “first reaction was to blame Laird for the leak” when the Pentagon Papers appeared.

But then one supposes the problems with Laird were minor compared to Kissinger’s plight in Nixon’s White House. One source tells the Kalbs that Kissinger’s relations with the rest of the White House staff were “as intimate as Caesar and Brutus.” After the collapse of Vietnam negotiations and the terror bombing of Hanoi in late 1972, Kissinger is reported to have said, “Haldeman nearly got me. He nearly got me.” Still later, after his adversaries had been fired and he was appointed Secretary of State, Kissinger is quoted as saying Haldeman and Ehrlichman were “men with a

Gestapo mentality." So much for fear and loathing in the West Wing. But the Kalbs never take us beyond these bizarre asides—to the pervasive impact of this atmosphere on foreign policy, to the implications of such characterizations for Kissinger personally and his sense of public service and responsibility, to what it can tell us and history about the "man" and "our time." It is not only a matter of discovering how government really works behind the press briefings, though that is serious enough. We owe Kissinger, and especially those who come after him, a more candid understanding of these ethical tensions in democratic government, and what we expect of the men who deal with them.

White House ethics are scarcely the only intriguing subject the Kalbs run past us without the analysis it deserves. On page 300, as Henry and RN review the options for hitting the North Vietnamese in the spring of 1972, the list tersely includes "Nuclear weapons?" "Rejected," says the next, and last, word on the subject. It must have been an interesting discussion—World War III and all that. But you won't find out about it here.

Eleven pages later, Laird tells the Kalbs, "Henry always enjoyed those military briefings, and he tended to believe them—especially when they fit into his strategy." Even considering the source, the remark raises the most serious questions of past and present policy by a man consistently portrayed by the press as a steadfast opponent of Pentagon excesses. Yet, again, the Kalbs' report on "one man and his central role" gives only passing attention to the decisive elements of bias, temperament, and information in decision-making.

### Brushing Reality Aside

In *Kissinger*, between the jet flights, telephone calls, and press briefings, policy seems to be born whole, springing with magic coherence from the mouths of Nixon or Kis-

singer. The reality, as the Kalbs surely know, is quite different. Foreign policy, like any other, comes howling into the world blind and bare, with painful and often brutal birth pangs in the bureaucratic process. Kissinger and Nixon sometimes evaded or dominated that process, sometimes compromised with it, sometimes surrendered to it. Each approach, for what it achieved and what it cost, is worth describing in a book that pretends to be serious about foreign policy. But *Kissinger* is astonishingly superficial in that respect.

Nowhere is that shallowness more striking than in the Kalbs' account of the 1972 SALT negotiations in Moscow, in which the national and bureaucratic stakes were so high. The Kalbs tell us that in the last hours of that bargaining on the momentous question of limiting offensive nuclear weapons the President made a final offer mainly because "he figured he could go no further if he hoped to retain JCS support for SALT." There,



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suddenly, amid the toasts and summit gossip, the bureaucratic reality intrudes, and then disappears. Of all the excruciating bargaining in Washington before Moscow, of Kissinger's historic victories and defeats in the White House basement long before he got to the Kremlin, there is hardly a glimpse. "JCS support for SALT," men with "Gestapo mentality," Henry and his affinity for "military briefings"—all belong to a world less dramatic perhaps, but ultimately more important in American foreign policy than any secret flight to Paris or Peking. Until we have understood that—and this book is scarcely reassuring—the bloody lessons of the last decade are still unlearned.

This chronic failure to look beyond the surface of diplomacy also puts the Kalbs at the mercy of their subject in describing some of his less glorious moments. Kissinger, we will all be relieved to know, "did not have time" to deal with the 1971 repression in East Pakistan that murdered thousands, drove ten million into squalid exile in India, and led to war on the subcontinent. The U. S. just "found itself siding with a corrupt Pakistani military dictatorship." It was the impersonal "White House" (not Henry, presumably) that recklessly ordered the *Enterprise* into the Bay of Bengal.

When it was all over, Kissinger "seriously considered quitting his job." For Henry, write the Kalbs, it had been "a personal disaster." Not because of the enormous human costs of the policy, however (a cost not yet fully paid, for the expulsion of U. S. agricultural technicians in the 1971 crisis helped contribute to the mass famine which is descending on India this summer). The problem was that he seemed to be "losing presidential favor," suspecting that his White House colleagues had arranged for the leak of the embarrassing Anderson Papers. The fears, it turned out, were probably groundless. The President had his own suspicions about the leak and set the plumbers on a trail that

led to a navy yeoman and the Joint Chiefs.

It is clear enough *whose* version this is, but whether there is other, conflicting evidence, or what the implications of this extraordinary episode were, the Kalbs apparently "did not have time" to investigate. Their concluding paragraph on the Pakistani tragedy captures the tone and depth of this and much more in the narrative: "Those were dark and gloomy days for Kissinger. They began to brighten up a bit only after the India-Pakistan crisis had vanished from the front page, and the President presented him with new diplomatic challenges."

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### Prisoners of the 'Primary Source'

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At worst, the Kalbs bring Kissinger through his "gloomy" times with this subtle exoneration, basic motives intact. The Soviet wheat fiasco? Henry was "so eager to conclude the deal that he ignored or didn't see intelligence reports about the magnitude of the Russian crop failure. . . neither Nixon nor Kissinger appreciated the economic ramifications of the deal. They were concentrating on linkage. . . and they never looked beyond that." It was as simple as that, folks. Everything you suspected about agribusiness, the Departments of Commerce and Agriculture, and the Administration's manipulations of the wheat sale in the hurried quest for detente and reelection is all explained away by the lofty nuances of one-man diplomacy. And what about a foreign policy conducted with this degree of ignorance or neglect regarding economic issues with profound domestic impact? "Next," the Kalbs continue, and we are soon back in the comfortable confines of Paris with Le Duc Tho, free of those messy, unanswered questions on undiplomatic subjects. Nowhere in more than 500 pages and the "record" of five years does *Kissinger* provide a thoughtful analysis of international economic issues.

The book breaks some new ground

but suffers the same limited "primary sourcing" when the narrative reaches more recent events. Kissinger seems to have given the authors a look at Brezhnev's threatening message that triggered the controversial October, 1973, alert of U. S. forces. "I will say it straight," they quote the Soviet leader, referring to Russia's threatened intervention against Israeli violation of the ceasefire, "that if you find it impossible to act together with us in this matter, we should be faced with the necessity urgently to consider the question of taking appropriate steps unilaterally." That message, combined with electronic intelligence indicating the alert of Soviet airborne units, makes Kissinger's case for a firm U. S. response, if not a full-fledged alert. But again the Kalbs obviously have the story chiefly from the least disinterested source. More investigative reporting might have answered the disturbing question, for example, of why the President of the United States stayed in bed a floor above an unfolding nuclear confrontation with the USSR. As it is, "not even Kissinger has given Kissinger a straight 'A' for crisis management on the night of October 24-25," privately admitting that "the global nuclear nature of the alert was too extreme." "Clearly not Kissinger's finest hour," conclude the Kalbs. How did it or could it happen, and might it happen again? But the chapter is over, and we're off to the Middle East.

As for Watergate, not surprisingly, the Kalbs have been no more curious than they were about the more sordid details of diplomacy. In the wake of Kissinger's Salzburg outbursts and the new doubts about his role, at least in the wiretaps of subordinates, the Kalbs' gentle description of how the taps began is worth quoting: "Nixon's trusted palace guard suspected that the leaks had originated with members of Kissinger's newly recruited NSC Staff, and he *found himself* on the defensive. He was, in fact, outraged by the leaks; and in an attempt to demonstrate his own loyalty, he

*joined* the search for the leakers. He knew that FBI wiretaps were quietly placed on 13 government officials, including seven members of his own NSC Staff, and four newsmen." [emphasis added]

Later, after the scandal had broken, Kissinger told the Kalbs that he "always suspected" his own phones were bugged and the taps on the 17 were really to incriminate him. As for other Watergate issues, he never knew about plumbers, and he "recommended" that Nixon "cut all ties" with Halde- man and Ehrlichman and release "all relevant tapes" demanded by the Special Prosecutor and Senate Water- gate Committee.

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### The Call The Kalbs Never Made

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On balance, the Kalbs pronounce, Henry comes out like "Lancelot among the brigands." Perhaps. But one could never rest the doubts with the evidence here. On an issue which Kissinger now regards, whatever his view earlier, as fundamental to his continuing in office, an issue which involves, after all, the Fourth Amend- ment as well as the integrity of the Secretary of State, the authors show no signs of research and investigation beyond news clippings, news confer- ence transcripts, and the assurances of the principal.

In *All the President's Men*, Bob Woodward recounts his telephone call

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to Kissinger to ask whether he had placed the wiretaps after an FBI source told Woodward they had been placed at Kissinger's initiative.

The White House switchboard put Woodward directly through to Kissinger's office. It was about 6:00 p. m.

"Hello," the familiar voice said in a heavy German accent.

Woodward explained that they had information from two FBI sources that Kissinger had authorized the taps on his own aides.

Kissinger paused. "It could be Mr. Halde-  
man who authorized the taps," he said.

How about Kissinger? Woodward asked.  
"I don't believe it was true," he stated.

Is that a denial?

A pause. "I frankly don't remember." . .

Woodward said that two sources had specified that Kissinger had *personally* authorized the taps.

A brief pause. "Almost never," he said.

Woodward suggested that "almost never" meant "sometimes." Was Kissinger then confirming the story?

Kissinger raised his voice angrily. "I don't have to submit to police interrogation about this," he said. Calming down, he went on, "If it is possible, and if it happened, then I have to take responsibility for it. . . . I'm responsible for this office."

Did you do it? Woodward asked.

"You aren't quoting me?" Kissinger asked.

Sure he was, Woodward said.

"What!" Kissinger shouted. "I'm telling you what I said was for background."

Woodward said they had made no such agreement.

"I've tried to be honest and now you're going to penalize me," Kissinger said.

No penalty intended, Woodward said, but he would not accept retroactive background. . . .

Woodward consulted Murrey Marder, the *Post's* chief diplomatic reporter. Did reporters usually allow Kissinger to determine, after an interview, whether it was going to be on the record, off the record or only for background.

Well, yes and no, Marder said. Technically, Woodward was right, but most reporters who covered Kissinger regularly let "Henry" place statements on background after the conversation. Half an hour later, Marder came by Woodward's desk to say that Henry had called him to complain bitterly about his interview with Woodward. Marder, Bernstein and Woodward went into [managing editor] Howard Simons' office to

discuss what had happened. . . .

Simons' phone rang. He picked it up, gave a few grunts and switched the call to the speaker phone so everyone could hear.

"Tell the assembled multitude, Bennie," Simons said.

It was [executive editor Ben] Bradlee, speaking from his home in a stiff German accent. "What are you guys doing?" he asked. "I just got a call from Henry. He's mad." . . .

Kissinger, moving up the line from Marder to Bradlee, was doing what in diplomatic circles is known as "hardening your position." His statement to Bradlee was that it was "almost inconceivable" that he could have authorized the wiretapping.

"Almost inconceivable" is not a denial, Woodward noted, and argued for the story.

But it was nearly eight, too late for the first editions. Simons decided to hold it. . .

Perhaps the most telling criticism of *Kissinger* is that after 549 pages, from Furth to Damascus, I literally cannot imagine the authors ever making that first call Woodward made to the FBI, let alone the cool, adversary conversation with Kissinger.

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## The Real Vietnam Story

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The Kalbs' apparent *tour de force*, and the section of *Kissinger* most likely to attract attention, is their description of the diplomacy of ending the war in Vietnam. The chapter on the collapse of the negotiations, October to December 1972, is easily the best in the book. Yet the Vietnam narrative raises more questions than it ever attempts to answer. It mirrors too the crippling reliance on Kissinger, the lack of independent analysis, and the sometimes exasperating naivete that mar the rest of the book.

The first half of *Kissinger* traces the subject's pilgrimage from innocent negotiator to sometime dissenter on the mining of Haiphong. It is not a path easily followed. Kissinger apparently had "no trouble" justifying the bombing in Cambodia, or lying to the public and Congress about it, but 20 pages later, without further comment, we learn on the eve of the Cambodian invasion that the bombing hadn't

accomplished anything significant anyway. Kissinger returned from a snubbed commencement speech at Brown in 1969 "tenaciously committed to the restoration of trust between government and the campus," but three months later was uncritically accepting military intelligence (as the Kalbs do, too) that the North Vietnamese were preparing a "real slaughter blow" against Saigon early in 1970, "the sobering realities," the Kalbs say, "of approaching winter."

The secret talks with Hanoi begin in the summer of 1969; but by early April 1970 it was "pointless to continue." The Cambodian invasion and the Laos debacle by South Vietnam follow in response to Communist provocations over the next year, with Kissinger in the latter case showing "little enthusiasm" but doing "nothing to block it." Yet Henry keeps negotiating in good faith, "bending over backward to meet Hanoi's objections." And "it was only in the third year of his official negotiations with

the North Vietnamese" that he "finally" realized that Hanoi "really expected the U. S. to join them in displacing Thieu." The Kissinger here has "misread" the enemy, had his "optimism" misplaced—a man of peace counting on negotiation.

What their primary source neglected to tell his biographers was that there was an NSC study of the mining of Haiphong and the carpet bombing of Hanoi—a "savage" blow, as he told his staff, to bring "a fourth-rate" industrial power to its "breaking point"—as early as the autumn of 1969. (The distinction between the two elements of the attack—the mining of Haiphong with its risks of confrontation with the Soviets, and the bombing of Hanoi with its inevitable civilian deaths—was never drawn.) Opposed by Secretary Laird and Kissinger's own staff analysis as militarily unavailing and disastrous in domestic terms, the "option" was set aside, complete with a draft presidential speech. Kissinger began the Viet-

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nam negotiations as he ended them, intent less on a lasting bargain with Hanoi than on an episode of ruthless intimidation, whatever the human cost, that would allow a "decent interval" to avoid a vividly imagined right-wing recrimination in the United States.

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### Thieu's Regrets

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Much of the continuing frustration with the Kalbs is that they seem to be on the verge of such perspectives and are never quite interested (or informed?) enough to follow through. Nixon "had rejected" mining Haiphong, they throw in casually without discussion, when the Chiefs raised it in 1970! So close yet so far from the "record." The flaws of the Kalbs' "primary sourcing" are still more serious, however, as they try to follow their subject through the final, bloody months of war and diplomacy. Here *Kissinger* suffers not only its own incongruities, but also some embarrassing contradictions with a recent investigative report by Tad Szulc ("Behind the Vietnam Cease-fire Agreement," *Foreign Policy*, Summer, 1974). These questions, we should remember, are not academic; they are against a backdrop of thousands of American casualties and incalculable carnage in Indochina.

Exactly when and how did Kissinger drop his insistence on North Vietnamese withdrawal from the South? The Kalbs say, almost in passing, that it was in October, 1970. Szulc argues convincingly that it was not until April, 1972, in Moscow; that the concession broke the negotiating deadlock; and that Kissinger had clung through three years of war to the fiction of mutual withdrawal despite an NSC study in 1970 which concluded that expulsion of the North Vietnamese was impossible. The Kalbs acknowledge that the Soviets did pass along to Hanoi the non-withdrawal concession after the 1972 summit, and progress then was rapid. But *Kissinger* never grips the most stark

question: Was the war and its slaughter needlessly prolonged on an issue Kissinger always knew he would abandon?

Finally, and most Byzantine, how did Henry deal with General Thieu? The point seems central to Kissinger's reputation and to the savage carpet bombing of Hanoi at Christmas 1972. Szulc recounts that Kissinger deliberately deceived Saigon on the negotiations, never warned them about giving up mutual withdrawal, negotiated a political arrangement behind Thieu's back, and in total dissimulation encouraged the South Vietnamese as late as August 1972 (he was already near a deal with Hanoi) to prepare an invasion of North Vietnam! The price of all that, says Szulc, was the now-famous Thieu refusal to approve the October 1972 "peace is at hand" deal, the resulting collapse of negotiations, and the terror bombing which was designed to appease Thieu after his humiliation by Kissinger's diplomacy. On most of these major points, the Kalbs are unaccountably vague. They tell us how Henry looked in Saigon in August, 1972, but precious little of what happened. There was a breakthrough in the autumn of 1972, but Henry began somehow to "ignore" the details, "assuming" these would be taken care of by "technicians and bureaucrats." "In the grand rush toward the finale," says *Kissinger*, "there was simply not enough time to scrutinize the fine print. . . the *Americans* [emphasis added] were careless." So when Henry flies off to Saigon, on his way to Hanoi and destiny, it all falls apart. The acceptance of North Vietnamese troops in the South was "not new," but General Thieu seemed visibly upset about it. He balks. "This is the greatest diplomatic failure of my career!" the Kalbs quote Kissinger talking to a Thieu advisor. "I'm sorry about that," answers the Vietnamese, "but we have a country to defend."

So Kissinger "found himself" between Nixon, Hanoi, and Thieu, and entering the "three worst months



of his life." The upshot is an effort to get a "token withdrawal" of North Vietnamese troops and other retroactive changes from the Kissinger-Tho October agreement; Hanoi refuses (it might have been a "mistake" to present new points, Kissinger later admitted); the bombing begins, apparently to penalize Hanoi for its perfidy.

There follows a mission by General Haig to Thieu, threatening a U. S. aid cut-off if he doesn't sign after Washington has "brutalized" Hanoi. Thieu relents. Hanoi comes back to the table to sign an agreement not significantly different from that of October. Kissinger wins half a Nobel Peace Prize. But why the bombing if Thieu concedes on the Haig ultimatum? Why does Kissinger later tell the Kalbs the gains of the terror strikes and the U. S. casualties over Hanoi were "marginal," that *he* would have signed the October deal? It is a sadly blurred picture, intimating intellectual and political bungling by Kissinger at an awful and needless human cost.

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### The Snapshot Approach

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Few important subjects in *Kissinger* are not better reported elsewhere—for example, SALT and Pentagon policies by John Newhouse in his *Cold Dawn*, the Jordanian crisis by Henry Brandon, and Indochina by Szulc. Nonetheless, its "reporting" is typical of diplomatic journalism, the concentration on the drama and logistics of the Kissinger shuttles, the fatal reliance on "highest" sources. *Kissinger* is perhaps the ultimate product of this malaise. Two sophisticated correspondents write a lucrative and much-heralded 549 pages with almost no trace of a leaked document or authoritative official informant embarrassing to Kissinger, in a government bulging with both. It is as if Woodward and Bernstein had reported Watergate largely from interviews with Nixon, or Upton Sinclair had written *The Jungle* from the "primary sourcing" of the meat packers.

*Kissinger* might have been written

very differently from questions and sources the Kalbs never probed, and beyond the answers they settled for. First, the subject demanded—and the authors' access to Kissinger afforded—a careful examination of the man and his concept of foreign policy. Henry Kissinger (in real life) is perhaps the most sophisticated, articulate, and *purposeful* man ever to guide American diplomacy. However controversial his positions, *he* can explain detente, the expedient subordination of human rights, the deliberate disregard of the developing world, and more. Intent on celebration, *Kissinger* thus misses a superb opportunity to open foreign policy to public understanding and debate.

And of the extraordinary man himself—so much of the story—there are only episodic, puzzling snapshots. He was, drop the Kalbs, "a believer in the persuasive power of bombs;" "always . . . a political chameleon;" would choose injustice over disorder; was the product of Weimar. The man and his policies merit more intellectual respect than this, and any serious book on Kissinger would proceed on such a basis. While we examine Kissinger's failures, we clearly need an equally deep exploration of his successes. SALT, the opening to China, the beginning of control on chemical-biological weapons, the brilliant Middle East diplomacy are all grand historic achievements that we should know how to emulate rather than simply cheer.

But the heart of the "record" is the man in relation to the government and country. How does he do it, we're entitled to know. Again, a serious effort to capture the subject would dig into ground the Kalbs leave sadly behind as the sleek 707 heads off to Paris or Cairo. To understand this singular dominance of U. S. foreign policy (and popular esteem) one has to write about how foreign policy is *made* in Washington (and New York), how Kissinger ruthlessly co-opted much of that world by bureaucratic skill and his remarkable relations with

Nixon, how he manipulated the Congress, how he played with astonishing effect on the bias and weakness of the media, how he exploited with all his constituencies, foreign and domestic, their preference for him as apart from his unlikeable chief—all themes the Kalbs seem to find pedestrian or irrelevant. Kissinger's story did not take place in press conferences or secret sessions with Le Duc Tho; it is a vast web of relationships, battles, circumstance, and seemingly petty events that are the stuff of government—not the stuff of best-sellers, perhaps, for the subject tends to be more complex and less a star, but much more the reality than the imagery here. It seems almost too obvious, yet the Kalbs have missed it: Kissinger is a phenomenon of the politics of foreign policy; he is its quintessential *politician* in every sense of that word. Portraying him as less not only stunts the man, but perpetuates our ignorance about a deadly business conducted by a few largely unanswerable people in Washington.

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### We All Deserve More

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Finally, this book owed us more than the protagonist's story of the agony of Vietnam. Seldom in history has a moment so illuminated the way we are governed as that last *four years* of killing. Seldom too have there been so many sources in government, here and in Saigon, deeply divided and disenchanted over the conduct of policy. But from the secret, illegal bombing of Cambodia in 1969 to the final madness of the carpet bombing of Hanoi, *Kissinger* refuses to tell more than the surface chronology. As for why it happened, why we and others suffered, and what role this one man *really* played in it all, we do not know. And the tragedy is that as many journalists know, we might have.

Fortunately, the revisionism may have already begun in the wake of Kissinger's outburst at Salzburg. Reporters have begun to ask, beyond

the communique, where Kissinger may stand in history and have begun to expose the darker side of the record. But the Kalb's book suggests how far we have to go in treating foreign policy and its high priests with the same sense of proportion, healthy skepticism, and self-confidence we now apply to local politicians. For the Kalbs have obscured the ultimate lesson learned by most of us who worked for this man—in the end, he is not an exception, but a logical (and perhaps frightening) extension of the way most of us do business. What is so grave about all of this—and what can no longer excuse superficial, misleading books on the subject—is that business on *his* level is literally a matter of life and death, paid for in tax money, in bills at the grocery store, and ultimately with the lives of our sons.

There is a price here also for the Secretary of State. Even beyond his current crisis of character on the taps, he has hoped for sympathy and support in the goal of restoring public confidence in foreign policy. And whether he realizes it or not, that confidence, particularly among the young, will come only as we open diplomacy fairly and fully to public accountability. There the Kalbs fail him. He could have stood the test of an investigative report, and we would all have been better for it.

But perhaps, as Kissinger himself seems to sense, we prefer our remaining illusions to the truth that restores the faith Kissinger longs for. It is surely easier for journalists to write such books, for editors to keep the reports up-beat, for the Book-of-the-Month Club to sell *Kissinger*. Yet we will have truly lost faith in ourselves—what Henry Kissinger fears most—if we believe that he and his “successes” are all we have left amid the wreckage of a corrupt government.

“To read this book,” advertises the Book-of-the-Month Club, “is an education in modern politics.” What an unintended and tragic irony. We—and Kissinger—deserve better. ■

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