

'Kissinger': hero worship

'Kissinger,' by Bernard and Marvin Kalb, Little, Brown and Co., \$12.50

The admiring chorus singing the praises of Henry Kissinger has gained a new voice: an extensive biography entitled *Kissinger*, authored by CBS news analysts Marvin and Bernard Kalb, further assures a favorable place in history for a man who has become the personification of contemporary American diplomacy.

The Kalbs portray Kissinger as a unique genius operating in a unique time in the history of international relations. Kissinger's major objective, they say, has been to replace the conditioned reflexes of crises diplomacy with responses and initiatives integrated into a long-range American foreign policy. In a world with nuclear weapons, Kissinger contends, the superpowers should restrain themselves from the dangerous pursuit of marginal political gains. Appreciating the profound changes taking place within and among the nations of the world — including our own, Kissinger has shuttled about in a tenacious effort to build a more stable structure for world accord.

The biography looks at Kissinger's early years as a young Jewish emigrant from Nazi Germany and continues through his successful career as a Harvard professor. But the brief discussion of his pre-Nixon days constructs a background for the book's central focus on the elusive personality of Kissinger the diplomat. The authors detail the negotiations leading to the Vietnam cease-fire (for which Kissinger and Le Duc Tho shared the Nobel Peace Prize), the disengagement of the Arab and Israeli armies, and the momentous detentes with Moscow and Peking. In reviewing Kissinger's accomplishments, they provide an enlightening look at American foreign policy over the past decade.

Moreover, they poke delightful fun at

Kissinger's "swinger" image. Consider, after all, Kissinger's own assessment of his charm: "Power is the ultimate aphrodisiac." Such a comment could apply as easily to his wooing of nations as to his charming of women.

His biographers attempt to uncover the real Kissinger and present their findings as objectively as possible, but apparently this is a difficult task for two reporters who have followed him closely for many years. They easily anticipated Kissinger's critics on many of the more questionable aspects of his negotiations; they have heard the denunciations often. Yet by offering only an



unconvincing *prima facie* defense of Kissinger's rationalizations, the Kalbs fail to explain some serious limitations of his approach to diplomacy. Their overall lack of criticism suggests that two more victims have fallen prey to the Kissinger mystique. They seemed unimpressed by the general outrage over such revelations as Kissinger's involvement in wiretapping, his role in the secret bombing of Cambodia in 1969 and 1970, and his "temper tantrum" over allegations linking him to the Watergate plumbers. The most recent embarrassment

followed the book's publication, when his interventions in the domestic politics of Chile were disclosed.

Their response to these disturbing issues of Kissinger's tactics is to circumvent them all by maintaining that his phenomenal achievements must surely acquit him of any indictments. Nonetheless, such a barrage of scandals ultimately corrodes the credibility of our long-term commitments with foreign governments.

As Assistant to the President for National Security, Kissinger's covert negotiating techniques and his gradual monopolization of power complemented well the clandestine Nixon Administration. But his domination usually left the State Department, Congress, and even American allies in the dark. The authors themselves referred to his characteristic paranoia as the "Nixon-Kissinger supersecretary." Even as Secretary of State, Kissinger failed to fulfill his promise following his appointment to "institutionalize" diplomatic decision-making and to relinquish some of his accumulated power.

"Henry's Wonderful Machine" may eventually become obsolete, now that America and the world are passing from the crucial moment in the transition of balancing powers and emerging nationalisms. Although the spectacular career described in *Kissinger* is far from finished, the book provides us with neither a realistic way of evaluating the limitations of the Kissinger charm, nor any means of predicting whether his participation is essential in the new era of world relations that has been ushered in by Kissinger himself.

As the authors fanned the flames of Kissinger hero-worship, they created only another smoke-screen obscuring the true identity of the famed super-hero Kissinger; Kissinger himself remains as elusive as ever.

— Ben Dean



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