

Henry Kissinger: War criminal and still at large at the age of 100



New York, June 8 (RHC)-- Last week, Henry Kissinger --former U.S. Secretary of State and presidential advisor to Richard Nixon -- turned 100.

A newly-released study shows how Kissinger committed war crimes while in office -- from helping Nixon derail the Paris Peace Talks and prolong the war of aggression against Vietnam, to giving the go-ahead to the invasion of Cambodia, and the green-light to destroy the Popular Unity government of Salvador Allende in Chile.

The study goes deeply into the founding of Kissinger Associates, which continues covering up for the 100-year-old former diplomat's crimes against humanity.

Many political observers say that Henry Kissinger should have gone down with the rest of them: Haldeman, Ehrlichman, Mitchell, Dean, and Nixon. His fingerprints were all over Watergate. Yet he survived—largely by playing the press.

Until 1968, Kissinger had been a Nelson Rockefeller Republican -- although he also served as an adviser to the State Department in the Johnson administration. Kissinger was stunned by Richard Nixon's defeat of Rockefeller in the primaries, according to the journalists Marvin and Bernard Kalb. "He wept," they wrote. Kissinger believed Nixon was "the most dangerous, of all the men running, to have as President."

It wasn't long, though, before Kissinger had opened a back channel to Nixon's people, offering to use his contacts in the Johnson White House to leak information about the peace talks with North Vietnam. Still a Harvard professor, he dealt directly with Nixon's foreign policy adviser, Richard V. Allen, who in an interview given to the Miller Center at the University of Virginia said that Kissinger, "on his own," offered to pass along information he had received from an aide attending the peace talks. Allen described Kissinger as acting very cloak-and-dagger, calling him from pay phones and speaking in German to report on what had happened during the talks.

At the end of October, Kissinger told the Nixon campaign: "They're breaking out the champagne in Paris." Hours later, President Johnson suspended the bombing. A peace deal might have pushed Hubert Humphrey, who was closing in on Nixon in the polls, over the top. Nixon's people acted quickly; they urged the South Vietnamese to derail the talks.

Through wiretaps and intercepts, President Johnson learned that Nixon's campaign was telling the South Vietnamese "to hold on until after the election." If the White House had gone public with this information, the outrage might also have swung the election to Humphrey. But Johnson hesitated. "This is treason," he said, as quoted in Ken Hughes's excellent *Chasing Shadows: The Nixon Tapes, the Chennault Affair, and the Origins of Watergate*. "It would rock the world."

Johnson stayed silent. Nixon won and the war went on.

That October Surprise kicked off a chain of events that would lead to Nixon's downfall. Kissinger, who'd been appointed national security adviser, advised Nixon to order the bombing of Cambodia to pressure Hanoi to return to the negotiating table. Nixon and Kissinger were desperate to resume the talks that they had helped sabotage, and their desperation manifested itself in ferocity. "'Savage' was a word that was used again and again" in discussing what needed to be done in Southeast Asia, recalled one of Kissinger's aides. Bombing Cambodia (a country the US wasn't at war with), which would eventually break the country and lead to the rise of the Khmer Rouge, was illegal. So it had to be done in secret. The pressure to keep it secret spread paranoia within the administration, leading Kissinger and Nixon to ask J. Edgar Hoover to tap the phones of administration officials. Daniel Ellsberg's Pentagon Papers leak sent Kissinger into a panic. He was afraid that since Ellsberg had access to the papers, he might also know what Kissinger was doing in Cambodia.

On Monday, June 14, 1971 -- the day after *The New York Times* published its first story on the Pentagon Papers -- Kissinger exploded, shouting: "This will totally destroy American credibility forever.... It will destroy our ability to conduct foreign policy in confidence.... No foreign government will ever trust us again."

"Without Henry's stimulus," John Ehrlichman wrote in his memoir, *Witness to Power*, "the president and the rest of us might have concluded that the papers were Lyndon Johnson's problem, not ours." Kissinger "fanned Richard Nixon's flame white hot."

Why? Kissinger had just begun negotiations with China to reestablish relations and was afraid the scandal might sabotage those talks. Keying his performance to stir up Nixon's resentments, he depicted Ellsberg as smart, subversive, promiscuous, perverse—and privileged: "He's now married a very rich girl," Kissinger told Nixon.

"They started cranking each other up," Bob Haldeman remembered (as quoted in Walter Isaacson's biography of Kissinger), "until they both were in a frenzy."

Though Watergate was as much his doing as Nixon's, Kissinger emerged unscathed thanks to his admirers in the media. He was (and still is) an escape artist. If Ellsberg gets away unscathed, Kissinger told Nixon, "it shows you're a weakling, Mr. President," prompting Nixon to establish the Plumbers -- the clandestine unit that conducted buggings and burglaries, including at the Democratic National Committee headquarters at the Watergate Complex.

Seymour Hersh, Bob Woodward, and Carl Bernstein all filed stories fingering Kissinger for the first round of illegal wiretaps -- set up by the White House in the spring of 1969 to keep his Cambodia bombing secret.

Landing in Austria en route to the Middle East in June 1974 and finding out that the press had run more unflattering stories and editorials about him, Kissinger held an impromptu press conference and

threatened to resign. It was by all accounts a bravura turn. “When the record is written,” he said, seemingly on the verge of tears, “one may remember that perhaps some lives were saved and perhaps some mothers can rest more at ease, but I leave that to history. What I will not leave to history is a discussion of my public honor.”

The gambit worked. He “seemed totally authentic,” New York magazine gushed. As if recoiling from their own sudden doggedness in exposing Nixon’s crimes, reporters and news anchors rallied around Kissinger. While the rest of the White House was revealed as a bunch of two-bit thugs, Kissinger remained someone America could believe in. “We were half-convinced that nothing was beyond the capacity of this remarkable man,” ABC News’ Ted Koppel said in a 1974 documentary, describing Kissinger as “the most admired man in America.” He was, Koppel added, “the best thing we’ve got going for us.”

We now know much more about Kissinger’s other crimes, the immense suffering he caused during his years in public office. He green-lighted coups and enabled genocides. He told dictators to get their killing and torturing done quickly, sold out the Kurds, and ran the botched operation to kidnap Chilean Gen. René Schneider (in the hope of derailing President Salvador Allende’s inauguration), which resulted in Schneider’s murder. His post-Vietnam turn to the Middle East left that region in chaos, setting the stage for crises that continue to afflict humanity.

We know little, though, about what came later, during his four decades of work with Kissinger Associates. The firm’s “client list” has been one of the most sought-after documents in Washington since at least 1989, when Senator Jesse Helms unsuccessfully demanded to see it before he would consider confirming Lawrence Eagleburger (a Kissinger protégé and an employee of Kissinger Associates) as deputy secretary of state. Later, Kissinger quit as chair of the 9/11 Commission rather than hand over the list for public review.

Kissinger Associates was an early player in the wave of privatizations that took place after the end of the Cold War -- in the former Soviet Union, Eastern Europe, and Latin America—helping to create a new international oligarchic class. Kissinger had used the contacts he made as a public official to found one of the most lucrative firms in the world. Then, having escaped the taint of Watergate, he used his reputation as a foreign policy sage to influence public debate -- to the benefit, we can assume, of his clients.

Kissinger was an eager advocate of both Gulf Wars, and he worked closely with President Clinton to push NAFTA through Congress.

The firm also made book on policies put into place by Kissinger. In 1975, as secretary of state, Kissinger helped Union Carbide set up its chemical plant in Bhopal—working with the Indian government and securing funds from the United States. After the plant’s 1984 chemical leak disaster, Kissinger Associates represented Union Carbide, brokering a paltry out-of-court settlement for the victims of the leak, which caused nearly 4,000 immediate deaths and exposed another half-million people to toxic gases.

A few years ago, much fanfare attended Kissinger’s donation of his public papers to Yale. But we’ll never know most of what his firm has been up to in Russia, China, India, the Middle East, and elsewhere. He’ll take those secrets with him when he goes.

* from The Nation magazine



Radio Habana Cuba