

CHAPTER
24**AMERICAN LIVES****Henry Kissinger**
*Secretly Seeking Shared Interests***Section 1**

"In a democracy the results of negotiations obviously have to be made available to the public. . . . The process by which these results are achieved generally should have a private phase."—Henry Kissinger in an interview with American Heritage magazine (1983)

Henry Kissinger was the first foreign-born person to serve as the U.S. Secretary of State. He achieved this high position through his skill at diplomacy.

Kissinger was born in Germany in 1923. Increasingly threatened after the Nazis took control in 1933, his family fled to the United States in 1938. He joined the army in 1943 and fought in the closing years of the war in Europe. Back in the United States after the war, Kissinger attended college and graduate school. He began to teach and write on defense issues. An early book introduced the idea of "flexible response." This idea rejected the 1950s policy of reliance on nuclear weapons for national defense. He argued that the United States should, instead, build conventional forces to be able to defend itself without nuclear weapons. President Kennedy adopted the policy.

After his election as president in 1968, Richard Nixon named Kissinger as his national security advisor. The post gave Kissinger daily access to the president and broad authority to carry out Nixon's new foreign policy ideas. The two worked together very closely. Kissinger launched talks with the Soviet Union to limit nuclear weapons. His secret visits to China and the Soviet Union paved the way for Nixon's historic visits. Secret talks with North Vietnam paved the way for the end of U.S. involvement in Vietnam, and he shared the Nobel Peace Prize in 1973 with Le Duc Tho, a North Vietnamese diplomat. In that year he helped negotiate a halt to fighting in the Middle East.

When Nixon resigned over the Watergate scandal, Kissinger—now secretary of state—stayed in office to serve President Gerald Ford. He returned to the Middle East countless times, using "shuttle diplomacy" to persuade Israel and Egypt to take some early steps toward peace. His efforts also established close American ties with Egypt. Negotiations with the Soviet Union reached another arms control agreement.

Kissinger has said that successful diplomacy has

two keys. One is secrecy. It is important, he believes, for diplomats to meet privately so they can explore possible solutions to a problem without heated public debate. The other is that an agreement must benefit both sides. "Nobody," he warns, "will sign an agreement that is exclusively in the other party's interest."

Kissinger has won wide praise—and criticism. Some criticized him for supporting the invasion of Cambodia and other aggressive acts during the Vietnam War. Others said that his agreements with the Soviet Union were too generous to the Soviets. Many critics focused on how far he went to ensure secrecy. When newspapers published secret government information, Kissinger was angered. He agreed to a Nixon administration plan to tap the telephone of his aides to see if they were responsible for the information reaching the papers. Critics said that the newspapers were simply pursuing the people's right to know and that the wiretaps violated the aides' rights.

In 1977 Kissinger retired as secretary of state and received the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the nation's highest civilian honor. In 1982 he formed an international business consulting company. On occasion, however, he has worked on assignments for the government. In 1983, he headed a commission analyzing U.S. policy in Central America. Four years later, he led a team that discussed arms control with the Soviet Union.

Questions

1. Do you think a democracy should be totally open or can it maintain secrecy?
2. Anyone, Kissinger once said, can criticize an agreement between nations on the grounds that the other nation gains something. The key to a good agreement is what your own nation gains in return. Do you agree or disagree? Explain.
3. Should newspapers have been allowed to publish secret information? Explain.