



The Kissinger Transcripts: The Top-Secret Talks With Beijing and Moscow

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

Henry Kissinger brought a near-obsessive sense of secrecy to the execution of his duties as secretary of state during the administrations of Richard Nixon and Gerald Ford, and took steps to ensure that this secrecy would continue even after he left office. Much of his paperwork is under seal at the Library of Congress, making use of a loophole in the Freedom of Information Act to keep the material away from prying researchers. *The Kissinger Transcripts* is based, then, on files obtained from the National Archive and the State Department.

The conversations with Soviet and Chinese officials reproduced here do not contradict the accounts in Kissinger's memoirs so much as they show just how much he omitted in his version of events. For example, Nixon and Kissinger, willing to bend U.S. foreign policy in a pro-China direction, made a stunning offer in 1971 to the Chinese Ambassador to the United Nations: "We would be prepared at your request, and through whatever sources you wish, to give you whatever information we have about the disposition of Soviet forces. I don't have it with me, but we can arrange it easily wherever you wish and in an absolutely secure way."

There are some interesting human touches, which, along with the historical data, make an invaluable contribution to our understanding of Kissinger's role in world politics. In 1972, he tells the Chinese UN ambassador that (then UN ambassador) George Bush needs "more backbone;" in sporadic appearances throughout the transcripts, the future president doesn't do much to nullify that appraisal. In a Beijing meeting, Mao tells his American audience that he enjoys his reputation for troublemaking:

"You must say that Chairman Mao is an old bureaucrat and in that case I will speed up and meet with you. In such a case I will make haste to see you. If you don't curse me, I won't see you, and I will just sleep peacefully.... I will only be happy when all foreigners slam on tables and curse me."

And then there's Nixon's appraisal of his globetrotting diplomat and ladies' man: "the only man in captivity who could go to Paris 12 times and Peking once and no one knew it, except possibly a couple of pretty girls."

Review

A welcome trespass on terrain that the former Secretary of State still treats as his private preserve. [The Kissinger Transcripts] properly reclaim at least a portion of the record that should have long since become public property. -- *Max Frankel, New York Times Book Review*

An absorbing book [full of] remarkable material on both Mao Zedong and Brezhnev. -- *Jonathan Spence, New York Review of Books, cover review*

Conversations that may have changed history. -- *Associated Press*

Graphic. [The Kissinger Transcripts] shows that President Richard Nixon's triangular diplomacy...involved a much higher level of U.S. strategic assistance to China than has been acknowledged officially. -- *International Herald Tribune*

New information [and] lighter moments in superpower diplomacy. -- *Los Angeles Times*

About the Author

William Burr, a senior analyst at the National Security Archive and director of the Archive's Nuclear Documentation Project, is co-author of *Atomic Audit*. The National Security Archive is a nonprofit research library of declassified U.S. Government Documents in Washington, D.C. A project of the Fund for Peace, the Archive obtains and disseminates the U.S. government documents that are indispensable for informed public debate.

Users Review

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Ophelia Ellis:

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