

reason, though Nixon and Kissinger had seemed to realize before taking office that the overriding U.S. interest was extrication from the war, once in power they seemed to shrink from the logic of their own perceptions.

There were, no doubt, varied personal and institutional reasons for this. Advocating a distasteful policy from outside the government was surely easier than actually beginning to carry it out. Too, once in the White House, Nixon and Kissinger were suddenly subject to a huge array of institutional pressures arising from a self-justifying system in which numerous reputations and bureaucratic interests could only be preserved by reaffirming existing policy. The information supplied by that system, while not entirely suppressing unwelcome truths, was certainly tilted toward justifying past decisions. As the settlement they had thought they could achieve kept eluding them, Nixon's and Kissinger's attitudes toward the North Vietnamese grew more baleful; it would have taken far more forgiving personalities than theirs not to begin wishing to punish those who denied them the political triumph both men thirsted for. Nixon and Kissinger were driven, also, by anger at domestic critics—particularly those who had participated in Johnson's war policies and thus seemed, to the new administration, outrageous hypocrites. And by temporizing, the new president and his adviser changed the choices before them perhaps more quickly than they had imagined would happen. Within less than a year of taking office, they no longer had the freedom to act as if undoing the mistakes of previous administrations; instead, they were compelled to vindicate the consequences of their own actions.

When their first hopeful overtures were rebuffed by Hanoi, Nixon and Kissinger spent the rest of their first year in office not disengaging from the war but imprisoning themselves in it, just as the Johnson administration had done. By the fall of 1969, Nixon's private comments no longer admitted the war was unwinnable or predicted its swift settlement. Instead, he was telling visitors, in words that could have been Lyndon Johnson's, "I will not be the first President of the United States to lose a war."

Like Johnson, too, Nixon came to see dissenters not as honorable critics but as witting or unwitting agents of treason. His administration soon began to recapitulate its predecessor's depressing descent into an intellectual and emotional state of siege. As criticism grew, his and Kissinger's differing insecurities seemed to bond, like two chemicals, into a new compound of angry, defensive rigidity. Within the fortress of their beliefs they listened, as the writer David Halberstam observed, "only to others who were believers." All doubts, whether arising from within the government or outside, were associated with weakness or disloyalty, and rejected.

Dissenting views were banished, too, as the result of Kissinger's bureaucratic style. Toward any possible competitors for power or influence, Kissinger's attitude was—no other word seems adequate—pathological. Through "incessant backbiting," as speechwriter Raymond Price called it, and by every other technique he could devise, some amazingly petty, Kissinger maneuvered to keep all rivals out of foreign policy decisions. With respect to Vietnam, he was largely successful. Among those excluded, to