

# Haig: Nixon Staff Chief With New Style

9/30/73  
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When Gen. Alexander Meigs Haig Jr. was offered the top civilian job in the White House, some of his closest friends advised him to stay in the Army instead.

"People said to me you must be suicide-inclined or ready for a mental institution to walk into that cement-mixer," Haig recalls. "But I'm raised on a tradition where you expect it to be a terminal situation at any moment, and I went ahead. I'm very proud and honored to be where I am."

Less than five months after he replaced the deposed H.R. (Bob) Haldeman, the President's longtime friend and No. 1 aide, Haig has clearly emerged as first among equals in a more accessible and independent White House staff.

And while his style is as different from the man he replaced as his military training is from Haldeman's advertising background, Haig in some respects equals his predecessor in influence.

After an uncertain start Haig has reorganized the White House staff, greatly expanded what he calls the "senior advice" available to the President and launched a careful review of the size and perquisites of a staff larger than any other in the history of the American presidency.

"The White House is like every other organization, except that the pressures are more difficult," Haig says. "You've got to have some mechanism of control or you have bureaucratic anarchy."

That mechanism has turned out to be Haig himself or, alternatively, what he calls his "little nerve center group"

that meets three times a week to implement decisions arrived at by the President and his senior staff of advisors.

Haig arrives at the White House every morning between 7:30 and 8. At 8:30 the enlarged White House senior staff meets over coffee in Haig's office, which is down the hall from the President's oval office.

Usually present at these meetings with Haig are counsellors Bryce Harlow, Melvin R. Laird and Anne Armstrong, Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, acting counsel Leonard Garment, Office of Management and Budget Director Roy L. Ash, legislative liaison William Timmons, Secretary of the Treasury George P. Shultz, energy advisor John A. Love and Ronald L. Ziegler.

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## HAIG, From A1

Ziegler, a presidential assistant who is functioning as director of communications, often is the first staffer to see the President, says Haig.

At the senior staff meeting Haig makes a point of going around the table and asking each person present whether they have anything to discuss. It is understood commonly among the senior staff that the morning meeting is a forum only for major items or for "touching base." Detailed discussions of problems are reserved for smaller meetings.

"Al runs the meetings crisply but fairly," says one senior staffer. "If somebody has something to say, he gets a chance to say it."

The senior staff meetings last from 35 to 45 minutes. Immediately afterwards Haig meets with the President for anywhere from 30 minutes to more than an hour. He often confers with Mr. Nixon again after lunch and sometimes meets with the President for a third time later in the afternoon.

Three times a week Haig convenes the "little nerve center group" in his office. Present are Haig's deputy, John Bennett, who also usually sits in on the senior staff meeting, plus another aide, David Parker, appointments secretary Steve Bull, personnel director Jerry Jones and Haig's adjutant, George Joalwan. This group discusses implementation of specific decisions arrived at by the President and the senior staff.

One of these "nerve center" meetings each week is devoted to a general review of policies in an effort to make aides aware of the "overall context" of administration actions. It is perhaps in this attempt to make even junior staffers feel that they are vital parts of the administration team that Haig differs most from Haldeman, who dispensed information on a "need to know" basis.

In the Haldeman White House, an aide recalls, persons were supposed to do their own jobs and not inquire into the activities of others. Haig believes that the "open White House," of which administration aides now boast, is of as much importance internally as externally.

He thinks that the enlargement of the senior staff meetings is of particular importance.

### "BROADER CIRCLE"

"Before, (John) Ehrlichman was the head of the Domestic Council but he was also the President's lawyer," says Haig. "Kissinger was everything in foreign policy. It was no secret that Haldeman was close to the President . . . now there is a broader circle of advisors. We've got a Harlow, a Laird, an Armstrong. We've got a Shultz for economics and he has a top staff under him. There is more contact with the Republican Party. (National Party Chairman) George Bush sits in on all of the cabinet meetings. We bring in 'wild cards' to the cabinet meetings—agency heads who have never been

there before—to give them a taste of what the cabinet is like."

It is the presumption of many that the President himself does not share in the new accessibility of his staff, but Haig says this is untrue. Ever since his press conference at San Clemente, says Haig, the President "has been more accessible and he's been going at one hell of a pace."

Haig says that in the past month Mr. Nixon has "unquestionably" been seeing more people and he includes cabinet members, congressmen and foreign visitors on this list. In Haig's view the relative inaccessibility of the President from his April 30 television statement on Watergate until his Aug. 22 news conference on the same subject was derived from Mr. Nixon's policy of "calculated restraint" on watergate issues.

"He's not the kind of person who weathers calculated restraint well—I don't think anybody does," says Haig. "It's good to be beyond it."

But has the President really put Watergate behind him? Haig was asked.

"I don't like to talk in glib cliches of that kind," Haig replied. "Watergate is important and we all have differing sensitivities about it. But there has been an over-fixation on Watergate. We have just so much time at the helm and we don't have any time to waste. Not that Watergate attention is wasted time. It isn't that. It's that we *really* do have a number of items before us that are of vital importance to the people of America—and frankly to the world because we are a world power and can't shrink from that.

"These moments we have to deal with these problems are precious to me and my staff."

This willingness to concede the importance of watergate in an attempt to go beyond it, plus Haig's consistent disavowal of cliches and slogans in a slogan-conscious administration, demonstrates another important difference between Haig and Haldeman. It is a difference that comes as no surprise to old friend Joseph A. Califano Jr., the former domestic advisor to President Johnson and ex-Democratic Party counsel, who warmly praised the Haig appointment.

Haig, said Califano at the time of his appointment, is "one of a new breed of Army officers who knows politics, international affairs and people." And he added: "He is just right for the job at this time."

### Doubts Expressed

Curiously, Califano's view is disputed by the man who had been domestic advisor during most of Mr. Nixon's first term. In a discussion with a reporter shortly before he testified before the Senate Watergate Committee, Ehrlichman expressed doubts about Haig's ability to administer the White House.

"I don't think Al is the right man for that job, for all his qualities," Ehrlichman said. "Bob Haldeman may not have been the indispensable man in the White House but he was the closest thing to it."





Associated Press

**Alexander M. Haig Jr., former general and Kissinger aide, heads for Camp David.**

At first, it seemed that Ehrlichman's prediction might be the more accurate one. Haig came in at a time when the White House was stopped dead in its tracks by Watergate, and he was slow to get things moving. Appointments were backlogged. Domestic decisions were held in abeyance. No one seemed to speak authoritatively for the President, and the President wasn't speaking.

The inner feeling of drift and indecision has all but disappeared in the last few weeks. One Haig admirer, who conceded that the former four-star general was "a slow starter" as chief of staff, believes he has built wisely in reorganizing.

"Al moved cautiously because he wanted to find out where the landmines were," says this aide. "He talked everything over with everybody and sometimes went back to them. He determined to form his own judgments about people and not rely on the conventional wisdom available in the White House.

According to one intimate, Haig realized that there would never be need again for another Haldeman in the Nixon White House. He accordingly built his influence as much upon the limitations of the chief-of-staff role in the post-Watergate White House, as upon its strengths. Haig says almost as much.

"I couldn't last here 10 minutes if I blocked a Laird or a Harlow from seeing the President, and I wouldn't even try," says Haig. "Any senior staff member can place a phone call to the President. They may also run into him at a



meeting—or he may call them on the phone.”

Usually, however, every senior staffer makes it a point to tell Haig when they want to see the President “because they know I have a schedule to be responsible for and don’t want some head of state cooling his heels while an informal meeting is taking

#### **Democratic Fashion**

What it all adds up to is that Haig, no less than Haldeman, is in control of the presidential schedule, although he exercises this control in a low-key, more democratic fashion.

“Access is much improved but there’s not a revolving door into the President’s office nor should there be,” is the way that Haig puts it.

In many ways, the square jawed 49-year-old veteran of two wars is an unlikely candidate to “democratize” the White House. His entire adult life has been spent in the military, after a boyhood in which Haig established the pattern of hard work that has characterized him all his life.

Haig was born in a Philadelphia suburb and his father, a lawyer who was assistant city solicitor of Philadelphia, died when he was 10. Haig worked throughout his school years, first as a newspaper carrier boy, then in the Post Office and as a floor walker for a department store.

In 1944 he obtained an appointment to the United States Military Academy at West Point with the help of an uncle who had congressional contacts. He entered West Point as a member of the final World War II class to complete study in three rather than four years and graduated June 3, 1947, with a second lieutenant’s commission.

Haig did not distinguish himself in scholarship at West Point, where he graduated 214th in a class of 310.

But his boyhood ambition had always been to become a soldier and he rose quickly in the ranks. He became a first lieutenant in 1948 and was assigned to the Far East Command, where he commanded a rifle platoon in the famed First Cavalry Division and played on the division football team.

Like many another aide in the sports-minded Nixon administration, Haig remains a sports fan and he plays tennis whenever he can.

“I’m not a humpty,” says Haig. “I’m not a pro, either.”

In 1949 Haig was administrative assistant to Gen. Douglas MacArthur’s deputy chief of staff in Japan. One person who knows Haig from those days attributes Haig’s penchant for “roundtabling” issues with many, peo-

ple as a reaction to what he then regarded as the excessively hierarchal staff system used by MacArthur. After his service on the MacArthur staff Haig saw action in the Korean War, where he participated in five battles including the Inchon landing.

Stricken with hepatitis, Haig returned to the United States in 1951. He rose rapidly in rank when he recovered from his illness. During the Vietnam War he served as commander of the First Battalion of the 26th Infantry and earned the Distinguished Service Cross for leading troops in action near An Loc.

Haig was a colonel and a deputy commandant of cadets at West Point in 1968 when Califano urged Kissinger to appoint him as his military advisor on the National Security Council.

In this job Haig quickly caught the attention of President Nixon. Haig subsequently played a significant role in reorganizing the National Security Council and in the 1972 negotiations that led to U.S. troop withdrawal from Vietnam.

#### **Long Suit**

Haig’s long suit, according to those who know him, is his ability to work long days under pressure for weeks at a time without losing his composure. He frequently leaves the White House at 10 p.m. for a late supper at home with his wife — “something light, I don’t eat much,” he says — but he maintains that his present schedule is easier than it was under Kissinger.

Asked if the pressures of the post-Watergate White House were “getting to him,” Haig replied:

“Not really. I had four intense years of working 24 hours a day for Henry because we were on a world clock. I was always getting out of bed at night to come down to work or responding to something that happened at 3 in the morning. I suppose you pay some sort of price physically, but I’m internally adjusted to the pace . . . I’ve always been a hard worker and I enjoy my work.”

Haig shares with President Nixon a belief in the necessity of a strong military defense coupled with a worldwide effort to achieve detente. Otherwise, he is considered relatively non-ideological and an implementer rather than an originator of policy.

That description suits Haig fine.

“I get a great deal of kicks out of national service and working with people, and I hope I’ve been some help here,” he says. “We face real challenges in this country. These are intensely critical days.”