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Backstage With H. R. Haldeman

The man who manipulates the backstage wires at the White House, H. R. Haldeman, is becoming entangled in his own crossed wires. Specifically, Senate investigators believe he may have tripped over some wires in the Watergate case.

Haldeman takes his orders, of course, from President Nixon. These are usually delivered in the form of terse, scribbled notes the President writes to himself when an idea strikes him. Often, he merely unloads the notes on Haldeman, who is left to implement the President's instructions in his own way.

Haldeman apparently has tuned his mind to the President's wavelength so successfully that he doesn't require elaborate instructions. Sources privy to the inner workings of the White House say the President, for his part, prefers to concentrate on high-priority problems and leave the lesser details largely to Haldeman.

The crew-cut Haldeman started out to be merely the President's first sergeant, who attended to the daily details and tongue-lashed the troops into action. But he quietly gained almost complete control over whom the President saw and what the President read. Even Nixon's faithful personal secretary, Rose Mary Woods, who knew his old friends and would slip them past the palace guard, has come under Haldeman's control.

This has given Haldeman enormous power, with great influence over presi-



Presidential assistant H. R. (Bob) Haldeman

dential appointments, political strategy and White House operations. Increasingly, he pulls the wires that control the people and the power plays around the President.

Haldeman exercises his power from behind the scenes, carefully staying in the darkest part of the President's shadow. He has surrounded himself with bright, disciplined, younger men who won't question his instructions. He deliberately brought them to the White House from comparative obscurity, with few political ties, and, there-

fore, less risk of divided loyalties. Their loyalty to Haldeman, say our sources, exceeds even their allegiance to the President.

Senate investigators and FBI agents alike have followed the Watergate tracks right up to Haldeman's door but can't get past his bright young assistants. The FBI men, for example, were forbidden from questioning him. Yet they were able to trace Watergate clues to Haldeman aides, who never make a move without asking Haldeman.

For example, the soon-to-depart pres-

idential appointments secretary, Dwight Chapin, admitted to the FBI that he ordered payments made for espionage and sabotage against Democratic presidential candidates. White House insiders say Chapin took his orders from Haldeman and could never have issued these instructions on his own. The two men were so close that Haldeman used to pick up Chapin on his way to the White House in the mornings.

Jeb Stuart Magruder, who was Haldeman's eyes and ears on the Committee for the Reelection of the President, testified that he ordered G. Gordon Liddy to set up a political intelligence operation. Liddy has been convicted of conspiracy, wiretapping and bugging in the Watergate case. Fund-raiser Hugh W. Sloan Jr., who also derived his power from Haldeman, acknowledged that he personally turned over \$199,000 to Liddy at Magruder's direction.

The President's personal attorney, Herbert Kalmbach, made payments to Donald Segretti who allegedly directed the espionage and sabotage activities against the Democratic presidential candidates. A White House source told us categorically: "Haldeman works through Kalmbach on the outside."

The contact between Segretti and Liddy, according to Senate investigators, was former White House aide Gordon Strachan. He also operated under the direct supervision of Haldeman.

The slightest suggestion that Haldeman had any knowledge of the Watergate affair, however, brings howls of indignation from White House spokesman Ronald Ziegler. The handsome press secretary seldom loses his cool, but criticism of Haldeman invariably strikes a sensitive nerve. For Ziegler, too, is under Haldeman's thumb.

The popular impression that Ziegler works for communications czar Herb Klein is false. Not long after the Nixon team moved into the White House, Haldeman arranged for Ziegler to report directly to him and, thereby, established control over the daily news flow. Then Haldeman installed his trusted aide, Jeb Magruder, as Klein's deputy. This left the able and amiable Klein as nothing but a front man who had to go through Haldeman to reach the President.

Haldeman is not popular inside the White House. "He looks like a boy scout," said a former aide, "but he's a pirate." Another told us: "Haldeman is completely pragmatic. There is absolutely no idealism in this man's soul."

But all agree that Haldeman subordinates himself for what he considers to be the good of Richard Nixon. A presidential intimate, explaining why the President has allowed Haldeman to assume so much power, told us: "The President had a dread that the demands of office would leave him no time to think. Bob Haldeman frees the President from the details that otherwise would drain his time."