

The Ford Upheaval and Some Explanations

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WASHINGTON, Nov. 5—The only explanation that President Ford has given for dismissing the Secretary of Defense and the Director of Central Intelligence and setting off a Cabinet upheaval is that the President wanted, as he put it, "my guys" in the jobs.

As unsatisfactory as that sounded to Mr. Ford's interrogators when he offered it and then refused to go beyond it at his news conference Monday, it may well have been genuine—if incomplete. The central decision that produced the shuffle of Mr. Ford's national security "team" was the President's decision to replace James R. Schlesinger, as Secretary of Defense.

According to the President's intimates, he made that decision alone, made it several days before he told anyone else and made it for a reason that, in a President, was strikingly human and personal: Mr. Schlesinger made Mr. Ford "uncomfortable."

Mr. Ford is hardly the first President to decide a personnel matter on a basis of human instinct. But that he apparently did so in this instance may tell a good deal about the limit he set on his well-advertised tolerance of dissent and on his self-proclaimed eagerness to conduct an "open" administration.

A few days after Mr. Ford became Vice President at the end of 1973, he had a long conversation with the Secretary of Defense. Mr. Ford was impressed with Mr. Schlesinger's erudition and he remarked later to an associate that Mr. Schlesinger seemed extraordinarily well-versed in the details of the sprawling defense establishment's activities.

Yet Mr. Ford also noted, the associate recalled this week, that he felt uneasy in the company of the self-possessed, professorial—and some say almost arrogant—Secretary of Defense.

After a quarter-century in Congress, Mr. Ford was accustomed to indulging himself in small talk and to count an easiness at idle repartee as an essential tool of politics. Mr. Schlesinger seemed to him stiff, doctrinaire and, for all the the secretary's evident ability, incapable of chumminess.

Not surprisingly, then, Mr. Ford told John Osborne of the New Republic in a revealing interview in the spring of 1974, when he still was Vice President, that if events should elevate him to the Presidency he would have doubts about retaining Mr. Schlesinger in the Cabinet.

The doubts, Mr. Osborne reported, bore on the Defense Secretary's seen inability to get along with key members of Congress—individuals whose personalities were much like Mr. Ford's.

Points of Opposition

When he did become President 15 months ago, Mr. Ford kept Mr. Schlesinger and the entire national security segment of the Cabinet, he said Monday, in order to underline to American allies and adversaries the continuity of foreign policy.

Although the President denied at the news conference Monday that there were any "basic differences" over policy involved in the Cabinet shake-up, it had become evident that his uneasiness with Mr. Schlesinger personally had grown to include discomfort with the Secretary's dissents over policy.

Mr. Schlesinger opposed elements of the approach taken by Secretary of State Henry A. Kissinger for strategic arms negotiations with the Soviet Union. He cast doubt on the Administration's ability to supply Israel with military weapons, particularly Pershing missiles, after Mr. Kissinger's pledge of arms aid had helped produce the latest Egyptian-Israeli accord in the Sinai.

More important, at a time when Mr. Ford was preparing for a likely stiff challenge from Ronald Reagan and the Republican right in the 1976 campaign, Mr. Schlesinger fought against Pentagon budget cuts with an intensity that made Mr. Ford seem, by comparison, soft on defense.

"If you were facing a political year, an election year, you'd want to make sure that you surrounded yourself with people whom you could trust," said one individual privy to Mr. Ford's thinking. "You just wouldn't need that internal bickering."

The genesis of Mr. Ford's shake-up may have been a meeting on Oct. 16 with his "kitchen cabinet" of unofficial political advisers. They are said to have told the President that public divisions within the Administration were helping to foster a public perception of

Mr. Ford as a chief executive who was not in command. Mr. Schlesinger's dissents were mentioned specifically.

Even so, it is said to be doubtful that Mr. Ford would have moved to replace Mr. Schlesinger had the Secretary not complained at a news conference on Oct. 20 of "deep, savage and arbitrary cuts" in defense spending by the House Appropriations Committee. The committee chairman, Representative George Mahon, Democrat of Texas, is one of the President's oldest and closest confidants in Congress, a sometime golf partner, and Mr. Mahon was not pleased with the attack.

As one White House official stated it, "Anyone who looks very deeply for the reasons behind this shake-up is going to be wrong."

Within a few days of Mr. Schlesinger's attack on the committee led by the President's friend, according to the scenario being outlined now in the White House, Mr. Ford decided that his discomfort with Mr. Schlesinger had reached an intolerable level.

By one authoritative version, the first anyone knew Mr. Ford had decided to dismiss Secretary Schlesinger and create his own national security "team" as a consequence was on Oct. 25, when the President was said to have outlined his intentions to two Cabinet officers—Mr. Kissinger and Donald H. Rumsfeld, the White House chief of staff.

When all the changes had been set, leaked to the President's mistress to a stunned capital Sunday and confirmed by Mr. Ford Monday at the news conference, they included these abrupt moves:

Mr. Rumsfeld would replace

Mr. Schlesinger as Defense Secretary. Richard B. Cheney, Mr. Rumsfeld's deputy, would move up to become White House chief of staff. George Bush, the head of the United States liaison office in China, would succeed William E. Colby as Director of Central Intelligence. Mr. Kissinger would yield his second post, assistant to the President national security, to his deputy, Air Force Lieut. Gen. Brent Scowcroft.

The initial reaction produced a series of equally plausible reports and analyses. One was that Mr. Rumsfeld had engineered it all to secure for himself and his political ambitions an important and visible cabinet post. A second was that Mr. Kissinger, called on to cede the national security adviser's job, had exacted the dismissal of Mr. Schlesinger as his price for acceptance.

Still another was that Melvin R. Laird, the Reader's Digest executive who is a close political adviser to Mr. Ford, had proposed the changes to reduce the dominance of Mr. Kissinger over foreign affairs and the emerging power of Mr. Rumsfeld in domestic matters.

Conflicting Aims Together

Mr. Ford's refusal to describe what lay behind the shuffle made it difficult to determine whether such assessments were accurate. It seemed likely, at least, that the ultimate configuration of Mr. Ford's new "team" had been influenced by Mr. Kissinger, Mr. Rumsfeld and Mr. Laird for their separate and sometimes conflicting reasons, and that they had a crucial advantage of being aware at the outset of the impending shake-up.

"I did it totally on my own," Mr. Ford said. He kept repeat-

ing that his motive had been only that of wanting "a team that was my team," one that could "work together effectively."

There was no doubt in the White House that it would be a "comfortable" team.

General Scowcroft, long accustomed to being Mr. Kissinger's aide, was described by one of the general's military contemporaries as a capable administrator who seldom initiated policy and who "served through three wars without ever being in a fight." The allusion was to a policy fight.

Mr. Cheney, according to Ron Nessen, the White House press secretary, is virtually "interchangeable" with Mr. Rumsfeld in directing the White House staff.

And, most significantly, Mr. Rumsfeld was characterized among those close to Mr. Ford as an aide who had not hesitated and would not be reluctant in the future to argue with the President.

"I see Rumsfeld being just as hard-line on defense as Schlesinger," said one well-placed associate. "But he'll have more impact on policy. The President is at ease with him."

Moreover, said the associate in a reflection on the extent of the Ford Administration's commitment to openness, "you'll have strong views argued on the inside, not publicly."

It did not seem coincidental that in selecting replacements for the dismissed Secretary of Defense and C.I.A. director, Mr. Ford had turned to Mr. Rumsfeld and Mr. Bush—two men who, like the President, had learned in Congress how to debate hard issues without creating hard feelings.