

The Kissinger Syndrome Upsets D. C.

By Thomas B. Ross

WASHINGTON — (CST) — This provincial capital of the non-Communist world was struck dumb last week when a former pillar of the establishment stood up and said the Emperor's minister has no clothes.

It has long been part of the insider's wisdom here that Secretary of State William Rogers plays a secondary role to White House adviser Henry Kissinger in the formulation of President Nixon's foreign policy.

High-ranking officials have been saying as much privately for more than a year and newspapers have been speculating about it even longer. BUT is was considered bad form for any titled member of the government to say so publicly.

Then last Tuesday, Sen. Stuart Symington (D-Mo.), once a proper member of the Cold War club, rose on the Senate floor to declare that Rogers is "laughed at" on Washington's cocktail circuit because Kissinger is considered "Secretary of State in everything but title."

Symington, a former Secretary of the Air Force and a hawk turned dove on Vietnam, asserted that Kissinger is "the actual architect of our foreign policy."

Conceded Point

The Senator's point was that either Rogers' power should be restored or he should be replaced by Kissinger as the President's spokesman in testimony before Congress.

Nixon promptly called a press conference to defend "my oldest and closest friend in the cabinet." But his remarks did little to change any minds. In fact, he implicitly conceded Symington's case.

For the President, while describing Rogers as "the chief foreign policy spokesman of the Administration," indicated that Kissinger has a broader role — "not only foreign policy but national security policy — the coordination of those policies."

In other words, Kissinger stands at the focal point not only of the State Department's recommendations but also those of the Defense Department and the Central Intelligence Agency, which command much more money and probably more influence over U.S. operations abroad.

Security Council

Kissinger's power grows out of his position as director of the National Security Council, which, under Nixon, has been restored to its original pre-eminence.

The Security Council was created in 1947 to enable President Truman to conduct the Cold War with the same kind of strong, central control that Franklin D. Roosevelt exercised in World War II. By statute, it includes the President, the Vice President, and the Secretaries of State and defense.

Under Truman and President Eisenhower, it was dominated by two forceful secretaries of state, Dean Acheson and John Foster Dulles.

Eisenhower ran it much like a military staff with the director presiding as chief of staff over a wide range of committees that prepared meticulously detailed position papers on foreign countries and issues.

The members of the NSC then debated, revised and approved the papers, and the director was charged with seeing that they were put into effect.

President Kennedy decided, even before he took office, that the NSC routine had degenerated into bureaucratic formalism. In one of his first official acts, in the words of his adviser Arthur Schlesinger, Kennedy "slaughtered committees right and left."

The stated object was to restore the President's personal control over foreign policy and to reassert the prerogatives of the Secretary of State.

Bundy's Power

However, Dean Rusk failed to assert himself to Kennedy's satisfaction and, again according to Schlesinger, he was soon complaining: "Dammit, (McGeorge) Bundy and I get more done in one day in the White House than they do in six months at the State Department."

Bundy, Kennedy's special assistant for National Security Affairs, was soon exercising the powers of the NSC without the old encumbrances

of the committee structure.

Meanwhile, Defense Secretary Robert McNamara was cutting into the State Department's domain by issuing an annual "posture statement," full of sweeping foreign policy pronouncements.

Despite McNamara's competition, Bundy wielded considerably more power than any previous director of the NSC. And his successor, Walt W. Rostow, sustained the status of the job under President Johnson despite a resurgence in Rusk's influence.

When Nixon took office, he restored the Eisenhower-type staff structure to the NSC but, at the same time, retained the Bundy-type dominance of the director.

Thus Kissinger inherited the best of both worlds, a large, loyal staff and a tradition of equality with the cabinet officers.

Defense Secretary Melvin Laird has not achieved the influence of McNamara under Kennedy. And Rogers, who lacked his predecessor's diplomatic background, has not achieved Rusk's influence under Johnson.

Nixon Refusal

Kissinger, a brilliant scholar of foreign affairs and a surprisingly aggressive administrator, has filled the vacuum to become the dominant administration figure in international affairs.

As such, Symington, Sen. J. William Fulbright (D-Ark.) and other critics of the war have sought to hold him accountable, particularly on Vietnam.

Kissinger has agreed to a number of informal meetings, including at least one visit to Fulbright's home. But the Senators want him on more formal terms, possibly for a televised hearing.

Nixon has refused, invoking "executive privilege."

The Senators have agreed that the constitution directs the President to seek the Senate's "advise and consent" on foreign policy but presidents have successfully shielded themselves from congressional scrutiny, largely by avoiding formal treaties and declarations of war and also by centralizing power in White House aides who, unlike cabinet officers, do not operate under the tradition of congressional consultation.

Nixon displayed supreme confidence at his press conference in his ability to prevail against Symington's "cheap shot."

Afterward, the Senators confessed that they could see no practical way of forcing Kissinger to testify.

But they expressed hope that by putting the spotlight on his unaccountable power, the people would be moved to bring indirect pressure on Nixon to open up his policies to greater public scrutiny.

News Analysis