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People Who Work For Kissinger

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Status on Henry Kissinger's staff isn't winging out to San Clemente on a military jet, or top-secret security clearance, or even access to the White House tennis court.

Status for the 48 members of the National Security Council staff is access to Kissinger. "The only thing that counts around here is your slot with Henry," said one of them.

Interviews with 18 Security Council aides offer a glimpse into the pressure-cooker atmosphere that surrounds those closest to Kissinger, who heads the council as President Nixon's special assistant for national security affairs.

"You do things for Henry you didn't think you were capable of," said Winston Lord, 34, of New York City. "He may know better than the persons themselves what they're capable of."

RECRUITS

In organizing his staff, Kissinger dipped into the federal bureaucracy, recruiting members from the State and Defense Departments and the Central Intelligence Agency. But he also went outside the government and hired a half dozen bright young people, some of them under 30 and some of the Democrats, to get the benefit of their expertise in the specific areas.

Among them are 26-year-old Mary Brownell of Asheville, N.C., whose speciality is Latin America; 28-year-old Rosemary Neaher of Garden City, N.Y., an expert on the Middle East, and 28-year-old Robert D. Hormats of Baltimore, an economic adviser.

For most of those interviewed, the sessions were the

first time they had authority to talk to a reporter since joining the National Security Council staff. All were instructed by Kissinger's deputy, Brigadier General Alexander M. Haig, to keep the conversations "non-substantive," meaning policy and national security matters were not to be discussed.

QUIP

They weren't. Nor were the staff members free with anecdotes about the boss, mindful perhaps of the time Kissinger reportedly opened a staff meeting by asking, "And who here is representing the New York Times?"

Under the ground rules, as laid down by Haig, the conversation tended to center on the demands Kissinger makes on his staff, and the satisfaction the staff gets from working for him.

"The motivation comes from working at the center of foreign policy," said Lord, who came to the National Security Council after service in both the Defense and State Departments.

As a trouble-shooter for special diplomatic missions, with emphasis on the Far East, Lord sees the boss more than most. He was one of two staffers to accompany Kissinger on the first mission to Communist China. "I think of Henry as a Vince Lombardi in the pursuit of excellence," Lord said.

SATISFACTION

Dennis H. Sachs, 28, of Portland, Ore., agreed with Lord that the job satisfaction stems from being at the center of power. "There's a psychic income of being associated at this high level with decision making," he said. "It's this income which sustains you."

Sachs, a Berkeley graduate with master's degrees in economics and urban regional planning from the University of Pennsylvania, is responsible for analyzing military and economic assistance programs. He joined the council staff from the Office of Management and the Budget.

Like most of his colleagues, Sachs works in the Executive Office Building next to the White House. With few exceptions, the council offices are small, utilitarian and furnished in Early Bureaucrat - plastic brown sofas, cheap impressionist prints and thin rugs the color of cement.

But if the staffers' offices are not impressive, their responsibilities are.

DUTIES

One of their duties is to write what they call "talking points" for presidential news conferences: questions they think reporters will ask and preparing the answers.

"It's great to watch one of these things and hear your question come up," one staffer said. "You know exactly what the President is going to say because you wrote the answer yourself. And the impressive thing is that he expands on your answer with his own ideas and insights."

Also, the staff is expected to consult with various government departments before drawing up memos, reports, recommendations and options. These go to the President who can then make a decision with full awareness of agency positions and national security implications.

"It's a powerful job," said General Haig. "These staffers have to be objective transmitters of any position

on any issue. They sit at the apex of policy machinery in the government. The only problems they deal with are the most complex. The easier ones are solved down along the line."

FUNCTION

A senior staff member explained the council's function this way: "The objective is not to reach a consensus for its own sake or to develop a course of action in which the President has only to choose yes or no, approve or disapprove; but rather it is to give him a clear description of the options he really has so he can choose, knowing what the costs and consequences of each of these options will be."

Several younger aides came to the council staff straight from academia, with advanced degrees and prestigious fellowships fattening their resumes.

While younger staff members occasionally represent the Security Council at agency or departmental meetings around town, they seldom deal directly with Kissinger, and they have no illusions about their role in policy making.

"When you first come here, you have romantic notions of your own ability as an individual to make policy," said young Hormats. "After awhile, you realize you're a small part of a team."