

Enter Dr. Kissinger!

By JAMES RESTON

WASHINGTON, Nov. 30—Henry Kissinger has now been liberated from the vasty deep of the White House. He has emerged at last in the full blaze of the television cameras as a public figure, spokesman for the President on China and on the tactics and strategy of American foreign policy.

They used to keep White House advisers to the President surrounded in mystery and fenced off from the inky wretches of the press by the doctrine of executive privilege. Harry Hopkins played the role for Franklin Roosevelt and actually slept in the White House. McGeorge Bundy was the muted voice from the basement of the Executive Office for Presidents Kennedy and Johnson, but always for a few carefully selected reporters. Even Walt Whitman Rostow, the gabbiest of all White House aides, displayed his alluring concepts of imminent victory in Vietnam on social occasions; but all of them were anonymous and were seldom identified as anything more than "a responsible source" or, at best, as "a well-informed circle."

So Kissinger's sudden appearance, front and center, before the baby-blue drapes of the White House briefing room was another Nixon "first," and the whole performance, while it must have dismayed the traditionalists in the State Department, fully justified the President's confidence.

He said very little with consummate grace, which is the art of diplomacy. He managed to convey the impression that he was letting the reporters in on the important nuances of dealing with China, though he let them in on very little they didn't know. He was considerate of the handsome and husky-voiced Ron Ziegler, whom he was replacing as the White House spokesman, and he was almost courteous to the forgotten State Department. It was not an easy assignment.

He had three awkward problems: to dramatize the President's February visit to Peking without encouraging anybody to expect too much; to explain the timing of the Peking visit in February, proposed by the President, without mentioning the Presidential primary elections, which start shortly thereafter; and to reassure the allies, particularly Chiang Kai-shek on Taiwan, that the President is going to do nothing in Peking that will place their vital interests in jeopardy.

Kissinger side-stepped all these booby-traps very well. He was very effective in arguing for talking to Chou En-lai but putting the questions in Chou's own terms: that the problem was to begin talking, to get the principles straight; not to try to solve everything in a week's visit by the President, but to create an atmosphere of confidence, and go on to practical problems later on in what was obviously going to be a long diplomatic and human process.

He even ventured to defend and excuse Secretary of the Treasury John Connally's manners, tactics and objectives on the international monetary problem, and somehow managed to explain that Mr. Connally was doing

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everything just right, but that maybe people didn't understand that there were awkward phases in these negotiations, and that Mr. Connally, who was a good and faithful servant of the President, was only using rough tactics for noble ends.

The good doctor, Kissinger, huddled at the microphone and slumped beyond the view of most of his listeners, didn't miss a trick. He had Hemingway's definition of courage—grace under pressure. He followed his brief. He fielded the questions and tolerated the shouts of "Question!" from the rear, repeated them, and gave his cautious and occasionally mystifying clarifications in good grace.

It was quite a performance: Kissinger, who didn't know Nixon in the last Presidential campaign, who was the confidant of Nelson Rockefeller, who wanted Rockefeller to win and Nixon to lose; yet here he was, finally emerging as Nixon's key spokesman on China policy, by-passing Nixon's closest friend, in this Administration, Secretary of State Rogers, and doing it all in the White House and before the television cameras.

Well, it's a funny way to run a Government, but at least this is the way it is really running, and it has now come out into the open. Kissinger has been playing an increasingly important role. He has won the respect of his staff, even when he drives them to exhaustion and they leave him. He has kept a link between the Nixon Administration and the university community, which is an achievement almost beyond belief; and now he has even taken on the task of explaining China, Moscow, Connally, Taiwan and the universities to a skeptical press in the noisy press room of the White House.

Pray silence, then, for the bold professor. Kissinger came here saying nobody could do his job for more than two years without being exhausted, corrupted and destroyed; but after more than two years, he is now explaining policy from the pinnacle of power.

In a way, it is a good thing. He has been under wraps as the President's private briefer to the Congress, to the academic and journalistic community, to the visiting big-shots from abroad, and meanwhile he has been refusing to appear before the committees of Congress, but going to Bill Fulbright's house in private to explain what this Administration's foreign policy is all about.

It will be harder now for Kissinger to play the Hopkins-Bundy-Rostow role of the White House aide with a passion for anonymity; for now that he has become a White House spokesman before the television cameras, it will be more difficult for him to claim executive privilege and refuse to appear before the Congress. And that may be too bad, for he has played a valiant role in private for the President, and nothing proves it more than his deft handling of the difficult opening to China.