

Nixon's Presidency: Centralized Control

This is the third of a series of articles on Richard M. Nixon's use of the powers of the Presidency and its effects on the Government and the national life.

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WASHINGTON, March 5—Frederic V. Malek is a 36-year-old self-made millionaire with boyish blue eyes, degrees from West Point and Harvard Business School and a reputation for being a super manager and an effective but restrained hatchet man in the jungles of Washington bureaucracy.

As the new deputy director of the Office of Management and Budget, Mr. Malek has set up a network of loyal Nixon men like himself in key positions throughout the department to help President Nixon get control of the permanent government run by 2.5 million civil servants.

Mr. Malek is the prototype of the managerial and business people whom Mr. Nixon has placed in high positions, and the Malek operation is an example of the President's methods as he has gone further than any modern President in trying to shape the bureaucracy to conform to both the style and purposes of the President.

The result is a highly centralized and homogeneous lead-

ership in the executive branch that accelerates a long trend of concentrating more authority and decision-making under the White House umbrella.

Mr. Nixon, by executive order, has put in force the main features of an Administration-wide reorganization plan that Congress had refused to pass. The Nixon order created a super Cabinet devoid of any former elected officials. He has moved into the White House authority over a variety of affairs, such as lobbying and press relations, that had rested in the departments.

Students of government agree that a wayward and stubborn bureaucracy has frustrated the goals of every President and that the President should exercise control. However, fears have been aroused that because of the manner in which the President proceeded, public access to the decision-making processes has been severely curtailed. This comes at a time when the Presidency

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has become the most powerful instrument of United States Government in history.

Thomas E. Cronin, a visiting fellow at the center for the Study of Democratic Institutions, in Santa Barrara, Calif., who has written widely on the Presidency, said in a recent interview that the White House "has become a powerful inner sanctum of Government, isolated from traditional, constitutional checks and balances."

Mr. Cronin said it was now common practice for "anonymous, unelected and unratified aides" to take important actions in both foreign and domestic area "with no semblance of public scrutiny."

There also are complaints from the President's critics that in his massive reorganization he has weakened his system of advisers and Cabinet members. Traditionally, Cabinet posts and other high offices have been held by politicians with diverse constituencies, scholars, innovators and in some instances political hacks, who represented a broad spectrum of the President's party and a sprinkling from the opposition.

In his first term, Mr. Nixon followed this pattern. But now high posts, with rare exceptions, are held by little-known Nixon loyalists who can be dismissed or transferred at will without creating a ripple in public.

Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr., the historian who was an aide to President Kennedy, wrote recently, "in his first term, President Nixon kept his cabinet at arm's length; and in his second term he has put together what, with one or two exceptions, is the most anonymous Cabinet within memory, a Cabinet of clerks, of complaint and faceless men who stand for nothing, have no independent national position and are guaranteed not to defy Presidential whim."

Drive Called Reform

President Nixon has explained his move against the bureaucracy as a reform effort.

"Americans are fed up with wasteful, muscle bound government in Washington and are anxious for a change that works," he said Jan. 5. He made the comment in announcing that he was issuing an executive order to place into effect his reorganization proposal that Congress had long ignored.

Even Mr. Nixon's enemies agree that a President must control the bureaucracy to some degree if he is to carry out goals promised in his campaign for election. Every President has acknowledged the frustration of doing so.

President Kennedy once became so discouraged that he told an aide not to abandon a minor project of remodeling Lafayette Park across from the White House, quipping, "Hell, this may be the only thing I'll ever get done."

No one is sure, not even Mr. Malek, how Mr. Nixon's extensive changes will work out. But the desire of Presidents to control the bureaucracy is so great that if Mr. Nixon succeeds, in the opinion of some Government experts, he may well set a precedent that will shape the future of the Presidency.

Nevertheless, the erosion of decision-making from the departments, which are relatively open, to the White House, which is inaccessible to many groups, has been increasing for some time, during the Kennedy and Johnson administrations, but more rapidly under Mr. Nixon.

Senator's Source Shifts

Senator Ernest F. Hollings, Democrat of South Carolina, said in a 1971 speech, "It used to be that if I had a problem with food stamps, I went to see the Secretary of Agriculture, whose department had jurisdiction over the problem. Not any more, I must go to the White House. If I want the latest on textiles I won't get it from the Secretary of Commerce. I am forced to go to the White House."

This is due partly to the fact



Frederic V. Malek, deputy director, Office of Management and Budget.

that in a more complicated society there are conflicts between the departments that have to be settled at the top. There has to be a referee between them.

But much of the reason is that the White House frequently does not trust the departments, which have constituencies of their own.

Examples of departmental loss of power abound. The Treasury Department, with a competent research staff, has for years been at the forefront of administration innovations on tax legislation. Now, sources say the department is rarely consulted as high-level policy discussions go on in the White House.

The Office of Management and Budget, a White House agency, recently suspended housing subsidy programs without consulting the Department of Housing and Urban Development. The State Department has been even further removed from foreign policy decisions than under the Johnson and Kennedy Administrations.

As a result, the White House staff, in Mr. Nixon's words, has "grown like topsy." At least 4,000 people were employed on the President's personal staff and in the executive offices at the first of the year, and others there had been borrowed from other agencies.

Big Reduction Planned

President Nixon has said that this figure will soon be reduced to 2,000, but most of the reductions are coming from the Office of Economic Opportunity, which was put directly under the President in 1964 to receive special attention but is now being dismantled.

"Agencies that really amount to entire ministries operate out of there under names the public rarely hears, such as the Office of Telecommunications Policy, [headed by Clay T. Whitehead] which oversees the entire communications industry," an Administration official said.

The White House assistants have a strong influence not only over the executive departments but also over the supposedly independent regulatory agencies in several ways. One example is that the Office of Management and Budget can stop investigations by the agencies simply by reducing their funds.

Miles W. Kirkpatrick, former chairman of the Federal Trade Commission, said that several of his investigations had been eliminated in this way. Senator Lee Metcalf, Democrat of Montana, has introduced legislation to restore budget control to Congress.

In 1968, shortly before Mr. Nixon's election to office, he said, "I want a Government drawn from the broadest possible base—an administration made up of Republicans, Democrats and independents, and drawn from politics, from career government service, from universities, from business, from the professions—one including not only executives and administrators, but scholars and thinkers."

In his first term he complied with that philosophy, appointing a range of executives that

included former Michigan Gov. George Romney, a liberal, as Housing Secretary, and former Texas Gov. John D. Connally, a conservative Democrat, as Treasury Secretary.

But some of his appointments caused him problems and frustrated his purposes. Administration sources frequently cite the example of Robert Ball, the Social Security administrator who was dismissed at the end of the first term.

"The President would make a policy and enunciate it," said a close Nixon aide, "But then Ball would go up to Congress, the doors to the committee room would close and he would say what he really thought. He was very persuasive. We couldn't have that."

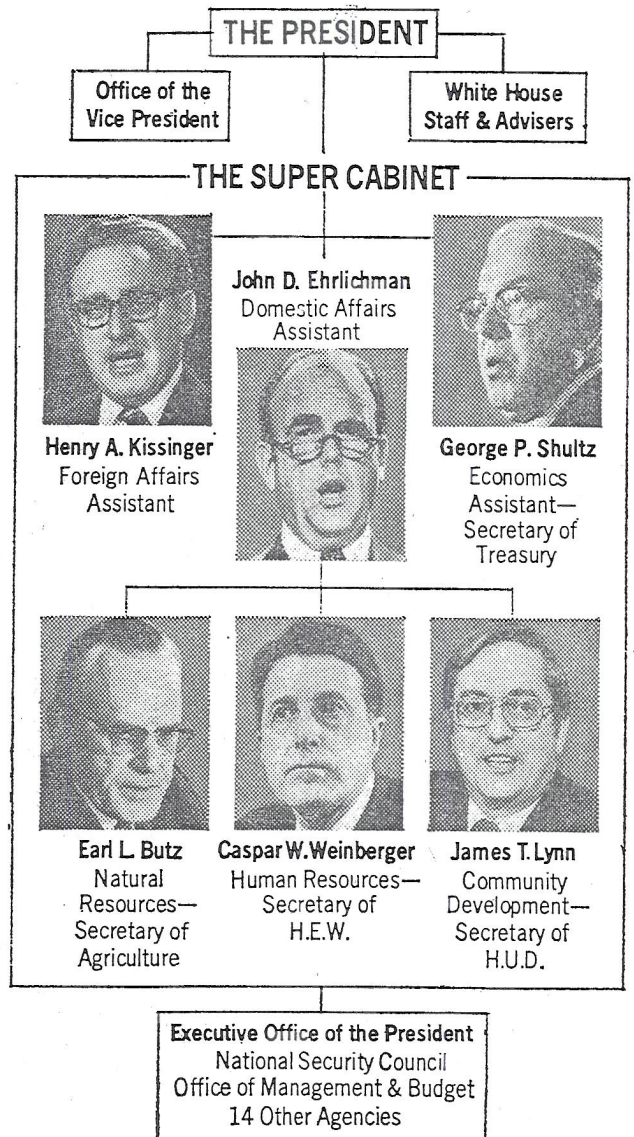
And there were more personal difficulties. Former Alaska Gov. Walter J. Hickel, Mr. Nixon's Secretary of Interior, who was dismissed after several disagreements with the President, wrote a book about his experiences. In his last meeting with Mr. Nixon, Mr. Hickel wrote:

"He repeatedly referred to me as an 'adversary.' Initially I considered that a compliment, because to me an adversary within an organization is a valuable asset. It was only after the President had used the term many times and with a disapproving inflection that I realized he considered an adversary an enemy. I could not understand why he would consider me an enemy."

No More Opposition

For his second term, Mr. Nixon has cleaned house of adversaries and policy thwarters. His new high-level appointments come mostly from the business world or from lower Administration posts.

The most controversial is



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that of Roy Ash, former president of Litton Industries, who is now director of the Office of Management and Budget. Because of the enormous policy decisions in that office and the fact

that Litton is a Government contractor with cost overruns, Congress is demanding through legislation likely to be enacted that the Office be subject of Senate confirmation.

But this is considered largely a symbolic protest. Even if Congress should prevail by overriding the President's expected veto on the issue, the President's power is so great in the selection of assistants that he could simply give Mr. Ash another title and let him perform the same duties, according to authoritative sources outside the Administration.

Foreign policy has increasingly centered on Henry A. Kissinger, who has the title of Presidential assistant for national security affairs but is frequently called the de facto Secretary of State.

"Henry is it in foreign policy, outside the President himself, of course," said an Administration official. "When Henry is off on peace negotiations or somewhere and something happens, say in Africa, the State Department just flounders around and waits until he gets in touch. Sometimes things are just put aside. Henry even handles all his own press relations and tells his assistants not to say anything.

It is the most centralized kind of operation you could devise."

Promotions From Staff

Mr. Malek's operation cuts across virtually the entire executive branch. The pattern has been for the President to pick a trusted White House staff member and appoint him to a higher position in a department or agency—John C. Whitaker as Under Secretary of Interior, for example.

There were conflicting reports on how the operation will

work. Some sources said that Mr. Malek, with four or five assistants in the Office of Management and Budget, would work directly with White House loyalists out in the departments to achieve goals and timetables to see that the President's policies were carried out.

Others, however, said it would mostly involve Mr. Malek and his assistants working with assistant secretaries for management, with full participation of the Secretaries. Nevertheless, the entire operation points to great White House participation in departmental operations, according to several sources, and this is enhanced by the fact that Mr. Malek was formerly the President's talent scout who recruited into government many of the officials involved.

In the past, department heads have frequently generated policies of their own not completely in accord with those of the President.

"This is a thing of the past now," said a high Nixon aide. There are other operations of a similar nature, such as the following:

¶The lobbying operation for the executive branch is being reorganized at Mr. Nixon's direction under William E. Timmons, the President's assistant for government relations, to make all of its members more responsive to the White House. Departmental lobbyists in the past have been picked by individual secretaries and thus have been loyal to the secretary first and the White House second, particularly if the Secretary does not see eye to eye with the president. Hereafter all Government lobbyists will be picked by the White House team and come directly under its jurisdiction.

¶The public information offi-

ces in the executive branch are being more centralized under a White House operation now undergoing revision. It is expected that the operation will be headed by Ronald L. Ziegler, the President's press secretary, with Ken W. Clawson, deputy director of communications for the White House, holding a top position.

Already the practice is for the White House to approve the public information officers in the agencies, insisting in most cases that they be strong on Nixon salesmanship.

The growing White House responsibility has required another layer of overseers to oversee the overseers. Mr. Nixon has brought four officials into the White House as counselors, while permitting them to retain Secretary functions. They are George P. Shultz, Treasury Secretary, for economics, James T. Lynn, Housing and Urban Development Secretary, for community development; Casper W. Weinberger, Health, Education and Welfare Secretary, for human resources, and Earl L. Buttz, Agriculture Secretary, for natural resources.

Among students of government there is less concern about the concentration of power than about the processes of government becoming obscured in the executive offices of the Presidency.

"We know almost everything about Presidents," James McGregor Burns wrote recently. "But we know all too little about the vast gray executive establishment that expands, proliferates, and partly devours the decision-making apparatus of the rest of the Government, behind the pleasantly deceptive 'low profile' of the White House."