

Rowland Evans and Robert Novak

Kissinger, Rogers And the State Department



Secretary of State Rogers and Dr. Kissinger.

By HARRY NALLENHAYN—The Washington Post

The polished corridors of the State Department last week echoed a mocking sound: ridicule of Secretary of State William P. Rogers for what one of his underlings called "a faux pas that anyone in his job for four years should have avoided."

Behind that soft mocking is the beginning of a new low-keyed move to pry Rogers out of State and replace him with Dr. Henry A. Kissinger. True, Kissinger is lauded by some Foggy Bottom diplomats for usurping U.S. foreign policy as President Nixon's alter ego. But he is also seen as the one man who could reestablish State's traditional control and arrest the abysmal decline of morale there.

The Rogers faux pas, as perceived by foreign policy experts both at State and elsewhere in the Nixon administration, was suddenly broaching the subject of U.S. diplomatic recognition of East Germany with Otto Winzer, East German foreign minister, in Helsinki 10 days ago. Some Western European diplomats defend Rogers on grounds he was merely confronting a future probability. Nevertheless, the fact is that he approached the East German official without any plan, without authority from President

Nixon and only because he happened to find himself seated near Winzer.

Likewise, Roger's subsequent, highly-publicized visit to Prague—the first official visit by a NATO foreign minister to the capital of Czechoslovakia since the Soviet invasion in 1968—stupified senior U.S. diplomatic officials. As one asked rhetorically: "Why should Rogers make himself the first Westerner to crash that barrier?" His answer: "Because the President sends Kissinger to Moscow and Peking and he has nowhere else to go."

Unfair or not, it is precisely such backbiting criticism that makes life miserable at middle and top levels of the State Department.

The demoralization there can be measured. Early in the Nixon-Kissinger-Rogers years, Rogers's top deputies valiantly tried to find out what U.S. policy really was, begging Rogers at morning staff meetings to tell them. Soon, however, they discovered that Rogers himself did not know. Today, therefore, the questions simply are not asked at staff meetings. One example: there has been no informed discussion at top State Department levels of Kissinger's forthcoming trip to Peking. An other example: high-ranking diplomats in the State Department are convinced

that neither they nor Rogers himself possess all the details and background of the second Nixon-Brezhnev summit last month.

"We don't even ask for memos (memoranda of conversations) any longer," a high-level State Department official told us. "We know we can't get them."

Some administration policymakers outside the White House, moreover, worry about possible damage to U.S. foreign policy by what they consider systematic exclusion of the regular bureaucratic machinery from submitting advice and participating in policymaking. The danger, as these officials see it, is that the tight control of information flow by Kissinger's small staff could lead to dangerous mistakes.

Naturally, Kissinger's associates at the National Security Council (NSC) deride all such talk, contending Rogers had all the facts about the second Soviet summit and other key events. They dispute the charge that the President and Kissinger make policy in a vacuum. Finally, they defend secrecy about Kissinger's forthcoming Peking trip on grounds it is nobody's business but the President's.

Even if this NSC rebuttal is accurate, it does not change the fact that

State Department professionals feel morale there is deteriorating so badly that Kissinger must replace Rogers.

Kissinger says nothing, but all Washington knows he would love to cap his spectacular career by becoming Secretary of State. The problem is Rogers. After three agonizing years in Kissinger's long shadow, he has learned to live with his impotence and apparently cherishes his ceremonial role. White House insiders say only a direct command from his old friend Richard Nixon would persuade him to leave.

Nevertheless, some presidential advisers far removed from the foreign policy field feel a switch of Kissinger for Rogers has now become essential to stop the State Department from descending into complete bureaucratic paralysis.

They say, moreover, that Mr. Nixon's post-Watergate policy of decentralizing White House power back to the cabinet departments would be stunningly dramatized by moving Kissinger to State. Senior diplomats agree even though they have never loved Henry Kissinger. "He's downgraded and humiliated us," one such official told us, "but if Kissinger came over here he could get 102 per cent support from every one of us."