

Now You See Them...

By Maxine Cheshire

White House and State Department officials are searching through closets and desk drawers in an effort to find out what happened to three valuable Oriental rugs and a gold and pearl necklace given to Secretary of State Henry Kissinger and his wife two years ago by Kurdish rebels in Iraq.

The existence of the gifts kept secret at the request of the CIA because an "extremely sensitive" covert operation

VIP

was involved, became known this past weekend when details were leaked to the press from an upcoming report by the House Select Committee on Intelligence.

According to a final report which the committee is expected to make public on Saturday, the gifts were sent to the Kissingers by the leader of the beleaguered Kurds, Gen. Mustafa Barzani.

The rugs were delivered through a CIA courier in late January or early February, 1974, according to a House committee source. The necklace, described as a wedding gift, arrived through the same channels in May, more than a month after the Kissingers were married.

What happened to the gifts after they were delivered to Kissinger's National Security Council (NSC) office at the White House is not clear. Under the

Foreign Gifts and Decorations Act of 1966, they are the property of the U.S. government and should have been turned over to the Chief of Protocol at the State Department for registration and storage.

However, a highly placed CIA official sent a memorandum on May 20, 1974, to Gen. Brent Scowcroft, who was then Kissinger's aide, advising that the gifts be kept a closely held secret.

"As you are aware," the memo says, "the relationship between the United States Government and the (ethnic group omitted) remains extremely sensitive. Knowledge of its existence has been severely restricted; therefore, the fact that Dr. Kissinger has received this gift (the necklace) should be similarly (sic)." The same restrictions apparently applied to the rugs.

Scowcroft, asked about the gifts on Monday by The New York Times, was quoted there as saying that "he was sure that Mr. Kissinger had complied with the law and reported the gifts to the White House gifts unit and that he was confident the gifts were not in Mr. Kissinger's possession."

Efforts to reach Scowcroft after he made the statement were unsuccessful. However, a State Department spokesman, Robert Funseth, also said later that day that the gifts "were turned over, or whatever happens to that kind of gift in the White House."

Asked where the gifts are now, Funseth replied: "As far as I know, in the White House where they have always been."

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CIA (D)

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But the head of the White House Gifts Unit, Marjorie Wicklem, said that she has no Kissinger gifts, no Kissinger gift records and no responsibility for keeping track of Kissinger gifts or records.

She referred the inquiry to State Department Protocol Chief Henry Catto, who by law is Congress' watchdog over such gifts, and whose office is charged with maintaining Kissinger's gift records.

Catto, too, said that he had never heard of the Kurdish gifts, nor was he ever advised by anyone on Kissinger's staff that there might be "such a thing as a classified gift" that wouldn't be formally recorded and stored.

Checking later with Kissinger's staff, Catto was informed that "the CIA and human inertia" were responsible for the failure to report and deliver the gifts to him after they became less sensitive.

"I'm told they are still in the

White House," Catto said. "I don't know where. Rolled up in a closet or stuck in a drawer, I guess."

Catto explained: "Sometime after he (Kissinger) left the NSC, one of his people told someone else: 'When you get around to it, send that rug and necklace over to the State Department.' The guy said 'Sure, I'll be glad to,' and then it went right out of his head."

When the gifts are located, Catto added, he expects there will be only one rug. Although the CIA memos in the possession of the House committee indicate that Kissinger received three rugs from Gen. Barzani, Catto said that he had failed to find "anyone who ever heard of more than one."

The White House began looking for the gifts on Tuesday. "When we find them," press officer Larry Speakes said, "we will let you know."

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