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Rogers Softens Denials Of His Leaving Cabinet

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Secretary of State William P. Rogers is no longer issuing categorical denials of reports about his imminent departure from the Cabinet.

In the wake of persistent rumors that he is about to be replaced by the President's national security adviser, Henry A. Kissinger, or by his own deputy, Kenneth Rush, Rogers is privately brushing aside questions about his future. In the past when similar reports have cropped up Rogers has assured questioners that he is having a fine time in his job.

Rogers is the only remaining Cabinet officer who was among the original appointees of President Nixon.

The latest reports in circulation have Rogers going to Moscow as the U.S. ambassador, a post that has been vacant for months, or to the Supreme Court when a vacancy occurs.

The Russians have been reported to be seeking a prestigious appointee to the Moscow post to match the naming of David K. E. Bruce to Peking.

State Department spokesman Charles W. Bray said last week that he has heard Rogers say "emphatically" that "there are two things he would never consider . . . a seat on the Supreme Court and any ambassadorial nomination."

Rogers has let that stand on the record but will not be brought to say it himself. He is reported to be going to Europe with the President in the fall. In private conversations Rogers cites the reports, but no more.

As for Kissinger, he has repeatedly denied in private that he has discussed the Secretary of State appointment with anyone. Yet within the State Department and among members of the diplomatic community, there are reports that changes are imminent.

When Rogers was named Secretary of State his reputation as a close confidant of President Nixon led many to anticipate that the State Department would be playing a significant role in foreign policy. Virtually from the beginning, however, Rogers and the department were eclipsed by Kissinger and the National Security Council. Foreign policy explanations emanated from the White House; background briefings were conducted by Kissinger. Morale at the department plummeted.

In the Watergate aftermath, Rogers' presence has not been notable in the inner councils, although no one knows how frequently Rogers and the President speak privately.

Within the department Rogers has won a reputation among some officials for withstanding efforts to put political appointees in jobs down to the deputy assistant secretary level.