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Old Team

In his choice of Melvin Laird, former Secretary of Defense and veteran Congressman from Wisconsin, as the new head of his domestic policy staff, President Nixon has selected a man with the political skills and experience which the former occupant of that post—John Ehrlichman—conspicuously lacked. The appointment has evoked a predictably favorable reaction on Capitol Hill and from Republican party activists.

Mr. Laird is an intelligent conservative who has shown himself flexible and shrewd. It is not easy to predict the impact he will have on the Administration's domestic and economic policy. Like former Treasury Secretary John Connally, the President's part-time counselor, Mr. Laird is likely to temper his ideological preferences with whatever measures look necessary to rebuild the President's popularity.

It is somewhat surprising that Gen. Alexander M. Haig, so recently nominated to be Vice Chief of Staff of the Army, should choose to end his military career in favor of replacing H. R. Haldeman as Mr. Nixon's senior staff assistant. In accordance with the law and with sound constitutional practice, however, General Haig had no alternative except to bring to an end his anomalous role as a general on active duty and also the President's top civilian aide.

Also mildly surprising is the President's decision not only to retain Ronald L. Ziegler as White House press secretary but to increase his responsibilities. His dismal record, particularly during the past year when he repeatedly issued false and misleading statements about the Watergate case, argues for his retirement rather than his promotion.

Mr. Laird and General Haig are able men but they do not represent the infusion of new talent from outside the Administration which many observers believe is essential to restore public confidence in White House operations. Mr. Nixon apparently is only comfortable with familiar faces. In this time of adversity, he is sticking with the old team.