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Haig Is No
Haldeman

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It doesn't say enough to assert that aide Alexander Haig gets less access to President Nixon than some White House watchers have imagined.

This is not really new, but informed sources stress again that Haig is not and never has been the kind of "managerial" aide that H.R. Haldeman was — with the co-equal support of former aide John Ehrlichman in many important ways.

(In this capital, incidentally, the circuit still buzzes with the notion that Haldeman continues indirectly to advise Mr. Nixon via calls to Ronald Ziegler and others.)

Ziegler, of course, acknowledged limited telephone contact. But if, as some observers of the President's establishment think, Haldeman still quietly serves today, it is at more than physical distance and thus may be severely restricted in value.

Naturally he can't issue orders to men in high station. If either Ziegler or any other Haldeman "transmitter" tries to effectuate the former chief of staff's suggestions or recommendations, casting real weight should be difficult. One source tells me he doubts Ziegler could even get through to at least one department head he knows.

However, this may be, this source thinks Mr. Nixon from an early time on allowed himself to be "crippled" by excessive dependence on the Haldeman-Ehrlichman team.

They offered him a blend of services — executing orders, managing and organizing activities, feeding in ideas from other sources — which the President plainly accepted as being performed with high competence.

They were able to do this while always avoiding the kind of tough criticism, of hard interchange, which the President inescapably equates with disloyalty. This aspect is what distinguishes them from such advertised consultative aides as Melvin Laird and, briefly, John Connally. The Haldeman-Ehrlichman manner of command, striking fear widely, made them effective as Haig is not.

Their makeup and their blend of service plus intense loyalty fit the President to perfection. He, through such heavy dependency upon them for so many things, was left free to pursue the foreign affairs functions of his job which he considers not only his special realm but the key to greatness in any president's performance.

Yet the widening judgment here is that Mr. Nixon has consistently misread both the history and the nature of the presidency, that he has given away too much in not being his own man in broader areas than foreign affairs.

Shrewdly, Haldeman and Ehrlichman made Richard Nixon, his welfare and his wishes (as they read them) their sole "project."

By that fact, largely conceded in their public utterance, they became his cripplers. But it takes two to tango. He let them cripple him. In his very narrow concept of the presidency, he wanted dependency upon them in large reaches of domestic affairs — obviously not excluding politics.

Personal caretakers, men who make a president or anyone else their all-consuming "project," are clearly not easy to come by. The mix of skills required is rare.

That's why Haig doesn't measure up, and why it's plausible to believe Haldeman continues — at one remove — to take a hand. But the inevitable handicaps in the present setup also explain why things are not moving smoothly in the White House.

From Mr. Nixon's view, one of the worst consequences of Watergate is that, forcing the Haldeman-Ehrlichman resignations, it exposes his self-imposed crippling — and the damage that may inflict upon the whole nation through an aftermath of fumbling.