

NYTimes MAR 8 1972
Rogers Calls His Policy Role 'Important'

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Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, March 7—

Secretary of State William P. Rogers asserted today that he and the State Department had played "an essential and important role in the formulation and execution" of foreign policy in the Nixon Administration.

The Secretary made his statement in response to persistent contentions that he and the department had been overshadowed in the foreign policy field by Henry A. Kissinger, President Nixon's adviser on national security, and the National Security Council staff.

In what appeared to be a well rehearsed answer to a question about his role during the President's visit to China, Mr. Rogers said at a news conference that he had spent more time in discussion with the Chinese Premier, Chou En-lai, than he had with other heads of government in the series of summit conferences Mr. Nixon held with allied leaders in December and January.

"In the past we have always had the heads at the summit meet and the foreign ministers meet," the Secretary said, "and we did the same thing here." Nonetheless, Mr. Rogers said, he spent two and a half hours in private discussion with Premier Chou.

"The only meeting I did not attend was the Mao meeting," he said, referring to the President's session with the Communist party chairman, Mao Tse-tung. The President's companion at that discussion, as well as all the formal sessions with Premier Chou, was Mr. Kissinger.

'Called on Short Notice'

"That meeting was called on short notice," Mr. Rogers explained, "and the President responded to the invitation.

"Although I realize it seemed very significant as far as all of us who were there are con-

no anger at recent reports about his secondary role in the formulation of foreign policy.

Since January, 1969, when he assumed office, Mr. Rogers and the department have been overshadowed by Mr. Kissinger and his expanding national security council staff. Mr. Kissinger's obviously focal role in foreign policy has resulted in a series of newspaper and magazine articles about the department's loss of influence and prestige.

The tempo of these reports has picked up in the wake of the President's China trip, during which Mr. Rogers dealt with technical matters while Mr. Kissinger accompanied the President at the top-level meetings.

As the secretary spoke today, State Department employees were crowding around the department newsstand to buy copies of the Washington Star, which carried this banner headline on page 1: "Sickness at Foggy Bottom." The lengthy accompanying article described the diminution of the depart-

ment's role and a sharp decline in the morale of the Foreign Service.

Mr. Rogers's comments at his news conference appeared to be part of a determined Administration effort to rehabilitate his prestige and that of the department.

Even before the President returned from China, White House press secretary, Ronald L. Ziegler, aware of the public comment caused by the secretary's absence from the Nixon-Chou meetings, began emphasizing that Mr. Rogers and the Chinese Premier had met privately several times.

This theme was carried out by the illustrations in the Secretary's 621-page, book-sized annual report. The pictures show the Secretary greeting a variety of world leaders, including Premier Chou, and Mr. Kissinger is nowhere to be seen.

Addressing this point himself, Mr. Rogers told reporters that the China visit was "the first summit meeting where I have spent so much time with a head of Government myself, by myself."

"I spent an hour and a half with Premier Chou on his airplane, and I spent almost an hour in my suite in Shanghai when he came to call on me."

Mr. Rogers added: "I don't think that the American people much care about things like this."

"What they care about is whether our foreign policy is successful," he said, "and I think it is very successful."