

NYTimes DEC 24 1973

Nixon Role in Foreign Policy Is Altered; Some Assert Kissinger Is Now in Charge

By LESLIE H. GELB
Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, Dec. 23— Profound changes have taken place in the way foreign policy is made in the Nixon Administration in the wake of the Watergate scandals and the appointment of Henry A. Kissinger as Secretary of State.

First, the elaborate National Security Council system of making decisions by presenting the President with the facts and the options, so that he is not at the mercy of the bureaucracy, has become less important. The formal committee apparatus of the National Security Council remains intact, but the council itself has not met since Mansinger became Secretary of State in 1971, and it met only twice this year.

A Disputed Interpretation

Second, the President is playing an altered and, some say, lesser role in the formulation of national security policy.

The effect of the change, according to a wide variety of senior officials in the State and Defense Departments and in Congress, is that Secretary Kissinger and not President Nixon is running foreign affairs and that the Secretary of Defense, James R. Schlesinger, has been left in charge of military affairs.

On the other hand, White House officials, in interviews with The New York Times, have said the conjectures along these lines are politically motivated nonsense aimed at trying to get the President. They say they come from people who

do not know what they are talking about.

"Henry receives and requests instructions from the President before he acts on any issue of importance," one of them said. According to the officials only the President, Mr. Kissinger and Gen. Alexander M. Haig Jr., the President's chief of staff, know exactly how decisions are made.

The White House officials conceded nevertheless, that Mr. Nixon had decentralized national security decision-making. One described the new situation this way: "Given the pros we have in the top jobs now, we can

do with a nod what used to take three hours of discussion."

Mr. Nixon's relationship with his two principal subordinates has become a matter of constant speculation in the bureaucracy and on Capitol Hill. Some Senators and other ranking officials say they have gotten the impression that Mr. Kissinger is now making most of the decisions himself. What annoys the White House most is gossip in the bureaucracy that what is happening is the equivalent of President Lyndon B. Johnson's decision-making

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"Tuesday lunches"—only now they are held without the President.

The situation is believed to have arisen because the President's time is consumed by Watergate and other troubles, allowing Mr. Kissinger to "take over."

The White House, asked to provide data on the frequency and length of meetings between the President and his Secretary of State, produced the following cumulative table, covering the period Sept. 1 to Dec. 7:

Days in same locality	45
Number of meetings	92
Telephone conversations	30
Days separated	53
Telephone conversations	38

High Frequency Seen

Present and former officials said the figures represented a high frequency of contact between a President and a Cabinet officer.

High foreign-policy officials described the President and Mr. Kissinger as dealing with their new situation on a tentative basis, but in the meantime the following patterns seem to be emerging:

¶ Mr. Kissinger is occasionally using his committee apparatus, which he still controls as assistant to the President, to keep his hands on defense issues and to circumvent the State Department bureaucracy, which has become his own.

¶ The National Security Council staff, so powerful in the early days of the Administration, is losing influence to intimates whom Mr. Kissinger took with him to the State Department and to those in the Pentagon who are favored by Secretary Schlesinger.

¶ A looser, more informal system for making key decisions is developing between Mr. Kissinger and Mr. Schlesinger at their "Tuesday lunches," which sometimes occur on Thursdays and sometimes at breakfast.

Three Broad Questions

Three broad questions were asked in the interviews with officials of the White House, the Defense and State Departments, Congress and the N.S.C. staff: What has happened to the formal National Security Council system? How are decisions really being made? How does the Nixon-Kissinger-Schlesinger relationship work?

The National Security Council was established by Congress in 1947 as the key advisory panel to the President on foreign and defense policy. Its statutory members are now the President, Vice President, Sec-

retary of State and Defense Secretary. Statutory advisers to the council are the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, now Adm. Thomas H. Moorer, and the Director of Central Intelligence, now William C. Colby.

Other important figures currently involved in the business of the council are General Haig and Maj. Gen. Brent Scowcroft, Mr. Kissinger's deputy on the council staff. On occasion in the past, Attorneys General such as Robert F. Kennedy and John N. Mitchell as well as Secretaries of the Treasury have attended meetings.

Of the Presidents preceding Mr. Nixon, only Dwight D. Eisenhower held fairly regular meetings. The others—Harry S. Truman, John F. Kennedy and Mr. Johnson, as well as General Eisenhower—basically used the aura that quickly developed about the council to legitimize certain policies that had been worked out in less formal circumstances.

Making Apparent Real

In 1969 President Nixon promised to make the apparent real. On Feb. 7, 1969, the White House announced: "The President indicated that the council will henceforth be the principal forum for the consideration of policy issues."

That year 37 council meetings were called. The number rapidly dwindled to three in 1972 and the two so far in 1973.

In the Hotel Pierre in New York before his inauguration, President-elect Nixon and Mr. Kissinger, who had been designated as his assistant for national security affairs, devised a new system of interagency committees. It was much more elaborate and intricate than the relatively informal system inherited from President Johnson.

All but one of the committees that report directly to the National Security Council are presided over by Mr. Kissinger in his capacity as assistant to the President. The membership of the committees is identical: Deputy Secretary of Defense William P. Clements Jr., Deputy Secretary of State Kenneth Rush, Mr. Colby of the C.I.A. and Admiral Moorer. Mr. Rush heads the under secretaries' committee.

Assistant secretaries of state preside over the interdepartmental and ad hoc groups. They are charged with carrying out the interagency staff work according to national security study memorandums, or

NSSM's (insiders pronounce the term Nissims) issued by the President.

In the first four and three-quarter years of the Nixon Administration, some 200 memos were issued. In the three months since Mr. Kissinger has been at the State Department, only four have been asked for.

Decision Memorandum

Once the staff studies are completed and reviewed by the first-tier committees, they are forwarded to the council. The President then releases a National Security Decision Memorandum.

A typical NSSM might deal with United States policy toward Thailand, presenting the background and the problems and offering three or four alternative courses of action. In the decision memo the President would state that he had chosen and direct that action be taken by the C.I.A., the Pentagon or an embassy.

The purpose of the system, as described in a 1970 letter from Mr. Kissinger to Senator Henry M. Jackson, Democrat of Washington, was to present the President with "distinct options, together with their pros and cons and implications and costs, rather than a single policy recommendation founded on bureaucratic consensus."

Mr. Nixon and Mr. Kissinger, according to those who helped them construct the system, were really worried about the bureaucracy. They saw it as basically peopled by hostile Democrats and tied to vested interests.

Mr. Kissinger was to create at the White House one of the most powerful staffs in Washington. That staff was to protect the President against the State Department, which was viewed as representing "foreign" interests; against the Pentagon, which was seen as an insatiable consumer of military hardware, and against an intelligence community that rarely saw evil intentions on the part of Moscow and Peking.

A Trickle of Memos

But in recent months, the council has stopped meeting, the memos have dwindled to a trickle and Mr. Kissinger has begun to carry off to the State Department his most trusted aides on the N.S.C. staff.

Former and present council staff members believe that sometimes the system did work to give the President the facts and real options rather than a phony "consensus option."

Senior military officers, in

particular, were said to be unhappy; they had regarded the system as an institutionalized channel for presenting military views on policy matters. "It's virtually impossible to get our views to Kissinger now," one said.

System Termed Alive

The White House officials disagreed. They did not think the system was dead. They maintained that when General Haig accepted H. R. Haldeman's job as chief of staff at the White House, he proposed that the system be decentralized, and that the President readily agreed.

They said the President decided that "we can do business in more efficient, less formal ways." One of them added: "These guys know the scope, and they know the issues backwards and forwards, but the President still runs the show."

According to the White House sources, Mr. Kissinger has an interest in perpetuating some functions of the National Security Council system since it allows him to do things that a Secretary of State cannot do.

For example, Mr. Kissinger has told many people privately that his main reason for retaining his N.S.C. job is to keep an eye on the defense budget. The defense analysis section of the staff has remained active. However, Mr. Kissinger is not known to have urged a reduction in the over-all level of military spending in the last five years.

The White House officials also acknowledged that Mr. Kissinger had used the council staff to circumvent his subordinates at the State Department. During the recent Arab-Israeli war, he sent messages to Middle Eastern heads of state through the Central Intelligence Agency communications facilities at the White House. The messages were drafted by the council staff, and high State Department officials were unaware of them. They were sent directly to C.I.A. field offices.

Mr. Kissinger also reportedly continues to use C.I.A. channels to transmit messages to Moscow and Peking. These "backchannel" activities persist despite his pledge before becoming Secretary to involve the State Department experts fully in their areas of specialization.

Meanwhile, according to Foreign Service officers, Mr. Kissinger's close associates from the N.S.C.—Winston Lord, Lawrence S. Eagleburger and Helmut Sonnenfeldt—are already wielding tremendous in-

fluence in Foggy Bottom.

At the Pentagon, officials said Mr. Schlesinger was also relying on particular individuals rather than a general staff rebuilding process. He seems to favor his special assistants and military assistants along with isolated experts, regardless of rank, they said.

This emphasis on key people and personal relationships rather than committees—not so different from previous Administrations—extends to the top of the ladder, to the Kissinger-Schlesinger relationship.

White House officials have explained, without prompting, that Mr. Kissinger was urged to establish cordial contacts with Mr. Schlesinger because of his poor relations with the previous Secretaries of Defense, Melvin R. Laird and Elliot L. Richardson. One man said Mr. Richardson was particularly miffed at Mr. Kissinger because he had regular lunches with Mr. Clements as a way of working around Mr. Richardson.

Mr. Kissinger and Mr. Schlesinger try to see each other for lunch or breakfast once a week and talk on the telephone frequently, according to Defense and State Department officials. These sources said that the important business gets done then. White House sources, on the other hand, said they were only "bull sessions."

At the same time, they acknowledged that the President's decentralization edict allowed the new Secretaries more scope than their predecessors had.

One White House official, discussing the idea that Mr. Kissinger is "taking over," said: "I know, I know, it's Henry's style. He makes it sound as if he's in charge." Another nodded, saying, "Henry just overwhelms them."

These officials vigorously insist that the speculation is malicious gossip, emanating from people who do not know the facts and who are out to take away the President's strong suit in foreign affairs. The officials emphasized that Mr. Kissinger attended almost every 8:30 A.M. staff meeting with the President, and then saw him alone later in the morning before leaving for the State Department. They said the two men also talked on the telephone almost daily.

Secretary Schlesinger does not enjoy the same access to the President. White House sources confirmed that he has not seen the President alone since going to the Pentagon.

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