



A Strong New Nixon Team

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PRESIDENT Nixon owes the Watergate horror for the best-staffed administration he has ever had. No one seems to have remarked upon it, yet it is another major point growing out of Henry A. Kissinger's promotion to the state department.

The development is not unprecedented. In the last couple of years of the Eisenhower administration, the president was ill, aging and a lame duck. He could no longer recruit the real, roaring tenth raters from the business world whom he overwhelmingly preferred.

So at the end, President Eisenhower had to be content with a secretary of state, Christian Herter, whom he actively disliked, and a secretary of defense, Thomas Gates, with whom he basically disagreed.

In the present instance, President Nixon has always shown high personal confidence in his new secretary of state designate, Kissinger, and his new secretary of defense, James Schlesinger. The difficulty used to be that such men commanded no confidence at all from the president's chief advisers, back in what may be called the Haldeman-Ehrlichman-Mitchell era.

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MAYBE it would be more correct to say that in the pre-Watergate era, the president's immediate entourage wanted as few persons as possible in key posts in government who did not appear to be easily controllable by persons like themselves. Sometimes they were deluded, as when they did not oppose Schlesinger's appointment to the CIA, or Elliot Richardson's earlier appointment to the defense department.

As for Kissinger's long overdue appointment, it was a change bitterly opposed within the pre-Watergate White House, mainly for rather sordid reasons. As for the Watergate-generated improvement in the White House itself, it hardly needs discussion. But there is one political point about all this which makes the President's quite undesired gain from the Watergate horror worth a lot of thinking about.

Briefly, the Nixon Administration used to rely on muscle to get what it wanted. But the president, again because of Watergate, has lost most of his former muscle, at any rate in the crucial areas of foreign and defense policy.

In these areas, the president now has — and for the first time — a united team capable of talking to the country.

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ONE thinks of the first Truman administration in this connection. The Nixon-haters, now, are hardly more violent than the Truman-haters, then. President Nixon's popularity has yet to drop quite so far as President Truman's all-time low. Yet a balky senate was still forced to accept the great Truman initiatives in the foreign and defense fields, because the country was persuaded by the Marshalls, the Achesons, the Forrestals and the Lovetts.

As yet, the Nixon administration has no potential ally on Capitol Hill of the caliber of that half-comical, half-great man, Senator Arthur Vandenberg, to whom this Republic owes an immense, forgotten debt. But if the new Nixon team also proves able to persuade the country, you will see the Nixon administration getting its way on Capitol Hill.