

Behind the Pentagon

Washington

A secret diplomacy that reversed the main currents of United States foreign policy led to the extraordinary struggles for information between the Pentagon and White House during 1971.

The diplomacy, which embraced a wide range of initiatives, including rapprochement with the Soviet Union and China as well as a breakthrough on strategic arms negotiations, was limited to the President, his national security adviser, Henry A. Kissinger, and a few staff aides.

One high-ranking former official said the extraordinary intra-governmental secrecy precautions applied by

Kissinger constituted "a war against the bureaucracy to a remarkable degree."

Another former national security policy maker based in the White House said, "It was always the operating principle that important things were kept out of the National Security Council system completely." This excluded the military from virtually all access to the new diplomatic initiatives.

The atmosphere of privacy that enveloped the Nixon administration's foreign and national security policies extended also to the State Department and the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency, which was responsible for developing strategic arms policy.

"There was a strong feeling that the whole NSC mechanism was a shell game managed by Henry," said a former official.

It was in this context, according to informed officials, that the unauthorized transfer of National Security Council minutes and documents was carried out by Pentagon military representatives in the White House.

The material specifically included transcripts of deliberations by the NCS's Washington Special Action Group on the India - Pakistan war in December, 1971. It included other sensitive records from the various NSC subcommittees over which Kissinger presided as special assistant for national security affairs.

The year 1971 was critical for all the major lines of innovation in Nixon administration foreign policy.

On May 20, 1971, President Nixon and Soviet Communist party leader Leonid Brezhnev made a dramatic joint announcement that was to break the deadlock on the first stage of the strategic arms agreement. Knowledgeable officials contend that Secretary of Defense Melvin Laird, Secretary of State William P. Rogers and Gerard Smith, chief of the strategic arms negotiating delegation, were kept in the dark until the eve of the public announcement.

"A lot of noses got out of joint on that one," said an authoritative source.

'Spying' Episodes

Kissinger's dealings with the Russians on strategic arms were of critical concern to the Pentagon. U.S. strategic military policy toward the Soviet Union is an important determinant of the size of the Pentagon's budget, its missile force and its targeting program.

The Army's main role is to contain the Russians in Europe, the Navy's is to keep open the Atlantic sea lanes. And the primary role of the Air Force is to maintain parity if not dominance over the Soviet Union, the only world power with missiles and bombers capable of destroying the United States.

Under the circumstances, according to one former official, the military "was sur-

prisingly docile" in its dealings with the National Security Council. I am not aware of what I would call a really bruising struggle... you could never have something like the admiral's revolt (of the post-World War II period) over the big bomber."

Kissinger anticipated deep and organized opposition to his policies, a knowledgeable ex-official reported, but it never formed. "Much of the bitterness and bitchiness in the bureaucracy was based on the belief that it was a rigged game and that they would never know until the final moment what the game was," this official said.

In January, 1971, the President also stunned the bu-

reaucracy with his disclosure of Kissinger's secret diplomacy in Vietnam. The revelation of Kissinger's solo negotiations with the North Vietnamese was news even to many officials working on the negotiations.

In the view of informed officials, the so-called spying episode between the White House and Pentagon was in no way a "Seven Days in May" scenario with overtones of military challenge to civilian authority.

"What the military was trying to maintain was what had been legally accessible in the past and which was slowly being choked off," observed a non-defense official.

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