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Rockefeller's place of power

By Saul Friedman
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WASHINGTON — Nelson Rockefeller, who has been given a commanding role in the White House Domestic Council, is in a position to become the most influential vice president in many years.

For while Rockefeller is to run the domestic policy arm of the Ford administration, his old friend, political ally and protege, Secretary of State Kissinger, will be running the foreign policy arm — the National Security Council.

Even before Rockefeller was nominated for vice president last fall, it was learned, he was assured of the dominant role on the council. Weeks ago, when top aides to President Ford heard rumors that Rockefeller and his people were to take over the council, several expressed concern that Rockefeller, in alliance with Kissinger, could overwhelm Ford with their influence.

Thus, when it was dis-

Advisers warned the President Rocky could overshadow him?

closed that the rumors were true, a brief flurry of complaints among some Ford staff members surfaced.

Despite the grumbling, Ford announced at a dinner Thursday night honoring Rockefeller that the former New York governor would "oversee" the work of the Domestic Council.

The council consists of most cabinet members and cabinet level advisers, with the President as chairman and the vice president as vice chairman. Technically, Rockefeller will have the same job on the council that Ford and Spiro Agnew had as vice president. But Rockefeller's real role will be unique.

For one thing, assistants who run the council (John

Ehrlichman and, later, Kenneth Cole, under President Nixon) usually are people of the President's choosing. In this case, two of Rockefeller's top hands, James Cannon and Richard Dunham, were named to run the 30-member council staff. Other longtime Rockefeller assistants are expected to join them.

The vice president's role on the council traditionally has been inactive, but Rockefeller, according to presidential counsellor Robert Hartmann, will have actual operational responsibility over the council for short-term policymaking and long-range planning.

The council staff is crucial in White House policymaking because it has the entire executive branch bureaucra-

cy at its disposal, and is in day-to-day touch with lawmakers and agency heads to give administration positions on legislation and regulations. Beyond that, the council's influence on presidential decision is formidable, for the staff assembles the data and the options on which the President must act.

Asked if Rockefeller, in effect, will be running administration domestic policy, Hartmann replied that the President has the ultimate responsibility, but that Rockefeller will be to domestic policy what Kissinger is to foreign policy.

Rockefeller and Kissinger have been close friends and political think-alikes since the late 50s when Kissinger, then a Harvard professor, was employed by the Rockefeller Brothers Fund. There Kissinger fashioned the foreign policy concepts he has since pursued, with Rockefeller's unstinting support.

Rockefeller worked closely with Kissinger on foreign affairs before coming to Washington. In the last few weeks Rockefeller, presumably with the approval of Kissinger and the President, has lashed out harshly at members of Congress who opposed military aid to South Vietnam and Turkey.

Rockefeller, like Kissinger, has been a forceful, knowledgeable public official who has sought power and has known how to use it. When his name was being

circulated by Ford as a possible vice presidential nominee, several close friends and advisers told the President he could be over-

shadowed by Rockefeller.

But Ford is somewhat in awe of the expertise, the knowledge and the experience of men like Rockefeller

and Kissinger.

"Let's face it," said a close friend of Ford's, "the President just doesn't know as much about some things

as Rockefeller and Kissinger, so he needs them. Even if they do have dominant influence, that might not be all bad."