

# Foreign Policy: Decision Power Ebbing at the State Department

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After two years in office, President Nixon has fashioned his own style in foreign policy and in the use of his staff. Correspondents of *The New York Times* have explored this foreign policy machinery, the power of the President's advisers and the impact of Washington's major institutions on foreign policy decisions. The role of the State Department is explored today in the first of a series of articles.

By **TERENCE SMITH**

Special to *The New York Times*

WASHINGTON, Jan. 17—The Department of State, once the proud and undisputed steward of foreign policy, has finally acknowledged what others have long been saying: that it is no longer in charge of the United States' foreign affairs and that it cannot reasonably expect to be so again.

By its own admission as well as the testimony of its critics, the department has been losing ground in the bureaucracy for a generation. In the opinion of many people in the department and outside, the erosion has accelerated sharply during the first two years of the Nixon Administration.

As President Nixon pledged during his campaign, he has gathered more and more of the business of foreign affairs in the White House. He has taken a personal hand in both the broad scope and mechanical details of foreign policy, from proclaiming the Nixon Doctrine on the American stance abroad to com-

posing the Government's official condolences to France on the death of de Gaulle.

The centralization of the formulation of foreign policy in the White House has been a characteristic of the nuclear age, when the issues have become so complex and the consequences of error so grave. It has, in fact, been the pattern since the days of President Franklin D. Roosevelt.

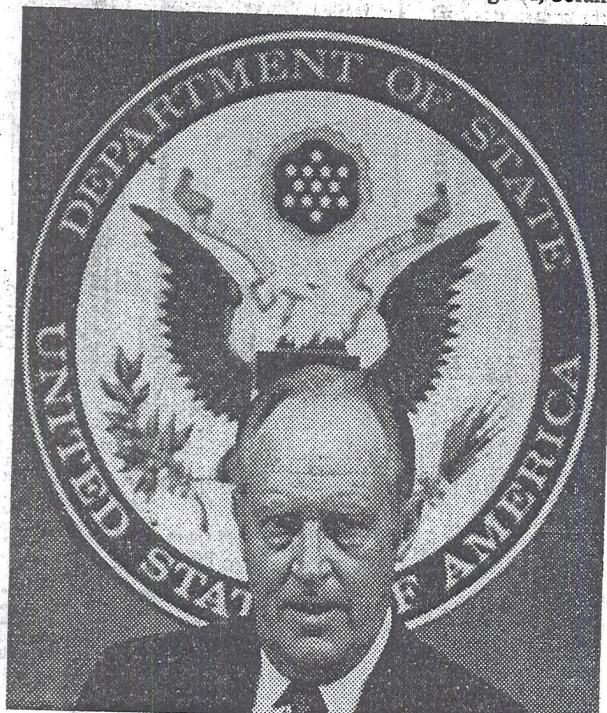
Particularly strong Secretaries of State arrested the trend during the Truman and Eisenhower years, but since the

death of John Foster Dulles in 1959, Presidents have dominated the foreign-policy scene.

The centralization has been most striking under President Nixon, who regards foreign affairs as his field of special competence. His detailed personal involvement has often been at the expense of the State Department. The 1970 message on the state of the world was a case in point.

The idea for a major year-end summary of the Administra-

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The *New York Times*/George James

William P. Rogers, Secretary of State. His department has lost ground during the Nixon Administration.

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tion's view of the world situation originated, with some prompting from the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, at the State Department. Secretary of State William P. Rogers planned to deliver it himself at the end of 1969.

Each geographic bureau was called upon to submit material. The project generated considerable enthusiasm because it presented one of those rare opportunities for people at the working level to play a direct role in phrasing the nation's public position.

### Rogers Team Was Absent

Before the compilation was finished the White House staff learned of the project, saw the possibilities in it for Mr. Nixon and pre-empted the idea. The department's draft was then turned over to the national-security staff, which wrote an expanded 40,000-word version for release under the President's name.

When Mr. Nixon signed the document in a White House ceremony last February, Henry A. Kissinger, his special assistant for national-security affairs, stood at his side, flanked by others on the White House staff. No State Department representative was present; Secretary Rogers and his aides were in the Ghanaian capital, Accra, at the time — about as far out in left field as they could be.

"The whole incident rankled," an assistant to the Secretary recalled later. "We all felt cheated on that one."

Increasing White House control of foreign affairs is one of a range of factors that have caused the 1,000-man State Department to slip from its once-unchallenged status as first among equals in foreign affairs.

As it is now, it not only stands second, but such a weak second that it is often unable to assert leadership over other departments, even on secondary matters. The influence of such agencies as the Defense Department and the Central Intelligence Agency has risen, meanwhile, until it has approached that of the State Department.

### Poor Coordination Results

That would pose no problem if the White House was able to orchestrate all aspects of foreign policy. Large as its staff has become — Mr. Kissinger has 110 people — it cannot do so, and in the secondary areas where it counts on the State Department to follow through, coordination is often poor because other agencies have developed the habit of taking their case directly to the White House.

On more than one occasion, as a consequence, the Administration has spoken with conflicting voices. Even the United States Information Agency, an offshoot of the State Department, has begun articulating an independent line.

It adopted a far firmer stand than the department, for example, in its broadcast commentaries last summer on Soviet "duplicity" in the Middle East — just at a time when the department was relying on quiet diplomacy to persuade the Russians to rectify violations of the Suez Canal cease-fire.

Reminded in an extraordinary memo from Secretary Rogers that U.S.I.A.'s Congressional charter requires it to clear policy with the State Department, Frank Shakespeare, its director, replied that he reported directly to the White House.

A conflict arose recently over the Administration's attitude toward the West German Government's controversial policy of improving relations with Eastern Europe. The official United States view, as outlined repeatedly in public by Mr. Rogers, is unqualified endorsement. But Mr. Kissinger and other members of the White House staff recently undercut that by disclosing personal reservations to several visiting diplomats and to newsmen.

### Furor in West Germany

The result was a furor in Bonn. The West German Government dispatched a high-level emissary to Washington to find out which view accurately reflected the American position. Significantly, the envoy went to the White House for his answer and emerged declaring himself satisfied that all was in order.

Despite the transfer of many foreign-policy functions to the White House, the State Department still conducts the great bulk of day-to-day business with the rest of the world. In such areas as Africa and Latin America, indeed, the department makes policy simply because the White House is too absorbed with other matters.

A departmental proposal to strive for closer communication with some of the left-leaning governments of North Africa recently became policy because the White House had been too busy with the Middle East crisis to review it.

The department is organized into five geographic bureaus, each headed by an assistant secretary and composed of "country directors" who are supposed to coordinate all the communications and issues between the United States and a given country. It is a focal job, and a strong country director, if he is left alone, can have a major impact on policy in the course of routine business, such as recommending aid levels and initiating exchange programs.

The system breaks down in the case of countries such as Cambodia and Jordan, where the White House has a strong interest and tends to take over



United Press International

When President Nixon signed the document on U.S. foreign policy for the seventies last February, no State Department official was present, only Henry A. Kissinger, Presidential aide, and members of his staff.

during a crisis. The country director's influence is also reduced in places like Korea and Taiwan, where the United States maintains large military missions and the impact of the Defense Department is correspondingly great.

A major change in the amount of aid provided under the military-assistance program, for instance, greatly affects relations with the United States. And it is the military who determine the rate of assistance.

The diminished role of the State Department is not a new phenomenon, but it has reached a point where its officials acknowledge it in public. "Diplomacy for the 70's," a 610-page critique of its shortcomings published last month, speaks of the "intellectual atrophy" that besets the department and adds:

"With the exceptions of an active period at the end of the nineteen-forties, the department and Foreign Service have languished, as creative organs, busily and even happily chewing on the cud of daily routine, while other departments, Defense, C.I.A., the White House staff have made important, innovative contributions to foreign policy."

Among the major elements that have contributed to the situation are the following:

*The President's view of how and where foreign policy should be made.*

Mr. Nixon has never made a secret of his attitude on this: by the President, in the White House. "I am going to call the turn," he told an interviewer in October, 1968, and he has made that stick.

Rather than "cleaning house," as he also said he would, he has largely ignored the department during his first two years, preferring to rely on Mr. Kissinger and the growing staff of the National Security Council for assistance on the major foreign-policy questions.



The New York Times

Joseph J. Sisco, an aide to Mr. Rogers, has become the key figure in the U.S. move for Mideast peace.

The President seldom makes personal use of the department's career officers and area specialists, in contrast to President John F. Kennedy, who frequently summoned assistant secretaries to the White House and sometimes stunned desk officers by telephoning them to get their interpretations of developments.

Mr. Kennedy also relied on the department in preparing for his news conferences, calling on it to produce answers to probable foreign-policy questions — another function that is now performed by the Kissinger staff. Of the 29 questions posed at Mr. Nixon's news conference on Dec. 10, 12 dealt with foreign affairs. He answered

without advance assistance from the State Department.

Despite differences in approach, Mr. Nixon shares with his predecessor, Lyndon B. Johnson — the view was also held by Mr. Kennedy — a feeling of skepticism about the capacities of the State Department. Mr. Kennedy found the departmental machinery sluggish and unresponsive — "a bowl full of jelly." Mr. Johnson relied heavily on his Secretary of State, Dean Rusk, but was deeply suspicious of the department, convinced as he was that any information circulated in its corridors would promptly be leaked to the press.

There is a consensus, accurate or not, among many State Department officers that beyond Mr. Nixon's skepticism, he distrusts them — that he tends to categorize them as members of the liberal Eastern establishment and is convinced that they, in turn, distrust him.

"He's right, in the sense that he is not and never has been a popular figure in this bui-

ing," a long-time officer observed, "but he has done nothing since he took office to make himself any more popular."

That attitude probably does not bother Mr. Nixon very much. There is every evidence that he gets what he wants from the State Department and that the relationship conforms to his wishes.

*The complexities of modern diplomacy and the vast proliferation of United States interests overseas.*

It was probably inevitable, in a world of nuclear power, instant communication and jet travel, that the State Department would lose its traditional monopoly. Too many of today's decisions are of such moment that they require Presidential involvement. The scope of the nation's activities overseas is so varied that any one agency would be hard pressed to conduct them all.

In addition to the classical exercise of political and military diplomacy, the United States is engaged at any one time in a dizzying maze of diverse and frequently overlapping activities, ranging from the peaceful uses of space to those of the seabeds. Over 40 governmental departments are involved at one time or another, employing about 100,000 people, only about a fifth of whom work for the State Department. Needless to say, their programs often conflict with—and contradict—each other.

Over 22,000 Americans—including military men—are assigned to United States embassies abroad. Only 4,600 of them, including secretarial staffs, are from the State Department; in some of the larger embassies they amount to as little as 15 per cent.

Outnumbered and outspent abroad (the budget for the year, it has been said, does not equal what the Pentagon frequently spends overseas in a week), the department would have been pressed to maintain its primacy over competing agencies regardless of the President's attitude.

*The State Department's internal paralysis.*

Despite relatively small size—among the major governmental department agencies only the Labor Department is smaller in terms of personnel—the State Department nonetheless ranks high in the Byzantine character of its procedures.

An instruction to an ambassador can require up to 27 signatures for clearance before it is dispatched. One new officer recently managed, by nagging everyone concerned, to put a moderately important cable through to an embassy in Southeast Asia in a week's time. He was astonished when more experienced colleagues applauded.

Another officer, against his will, developed a fat folder of interdepartmental paper on the question whether the cotton yarn included in a certain country's aid program would be shipped on spindles or bales. "I was going out of my mind," he recalled, "so one day I just threw the folder away and made a decision. Spindles. I never heard another word about it."

The department, swamped in paper, tied up in meetings and top-heavy with excess personnel, is often, by its own admission, unable to respond to a problem before the matter resolves itself.

*The Secretary and his interpretation of his role.*

The steady erosion of the department's status in the bureaucracy has been due, at least in part, to a succession of what McGeorge Bundy, president of the Ford Foundation, recently described as "quiet, reserved advice men" in the Office of the Secretary. Mr. Bundy, who was an aide to Mr. Kennedy and Mr. Johnson, noted in an interview that the last several Secretaries had tended to view themselves more as advisers to the President than as administrators of a large department and that the

department's status had suffered as a result.

The consensus, is that Mr. Rogers's greatest strength is his close and long-standing relationship with the President and that his greatest weakness is his relative inexperience in foreign affairs. He came to the office with only tangential exposure to foreign-policy problems gained from sitting in on National Security Council meetings during his years as Deputy Attorney General and then Attorney General in the Eisenhower Administration, but he had an intimate relationship with Mr. Nixon dating back to the early nineteen-fifties.

According to his associates, Mr. Rogers believes that he is serving a dual role in the Administration: first, as a "wise counselor" to the President whose judgment is available on any question, foreign or domestic; second, as the man responsible for executing the President's decisions on foreign policy.

The Secretary's critics, accuse him of failing to make his weight felt either on major policy issues or on the departmental machinery. They consider that he has neglected to ride herd effectively on the other agencies—especially the Pentagon—involved in foreign affairs and that he is too inclined to let his subordinates, particularly U. Alexis Johnson, his Under Secretary for Political Affairs, fight the department's battles in Administration forums. They also find him reluctant to master the details that are essential to many foreign-policy issues these days.

"Rogers thinks he can control policy by dealing in generalities," an experienced official observed. "But you can't—it doesn't work that way. The only subject he's really on top of is the Middle East."

**Growing Confidence Noted**

Such criticism is contested by the Secretary's supporters, who insist that he has displayed a steadily growing self-confidence as well as a comprehension of a wide range of

issues. They point to his direct involvement in the Middle East peace initiative, but they concede that his agency's active role in that area is due in part to the personal dynamism of Joseph J. Sisco, the Assistant Secretary for Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs.

More than any other Assistant Secretary, the blunt-spoken, aggressive Mr. Sisco has established a close working relationship with Mr. Kissinger and the White House. As a result he has become the focal operational figure in the American effort to stimulate a Middle Eastern settlement—an effort that ranks as the department's major foreign-policy achievement in the Nixon Administration.

Supporters of Secretary Rogers also maintain that he has been effective in arguing the department's view that troop commitments to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization be maintained and in urging modifications in the Administration's policies toward Africa and Communist China.

Most of all, they praise him for his accessibility and open-mindedness. Most people in the department, critics and supporters alike, find him far more receptive to new ideas and dissent than his predecessor and far easier to see on a day-to-day basis.

However, the performance of the Secretary's office has suffered, in the view of most observers, from the loss of Elliot L. Richardson, who was named Secretary of Health, Education and Welfare last June.

A strong executive with great energy and the capacity to absorb complicated detail, Mr. Richardson, as Under Secretary, was able to buck the bureaucratic tide and give the department a vigorous voice in the policy-making process. He also established a degree of rapport with Mr. Kissinger that Mr. Rogers has never achieved.

**Office Vacant Four Months**

Mr. Richardson's office remained empty for four months after his departure, and much momentum had been lost by the time his successor, John N. Irwin 2d, took over in September.

While the effectiveness of the Secretary has a major influence on the State Department's performance, it is the combination of all the factors—White House involvement, Presidential skepticism, bureaucratic competition and internal problems—that has caused the diminution of the department's status in the Nixon Administration.

Morale in the Foreign Service has suffered as a result, and few officers seem to expect the situation to improve in the near future.

It is not easy to find people in the department who believe that the many procedural changes suggested in "Diplomacy for the 70's," will significantly alter the situation. Their skepticism is perhaps understandable: It was the eighth major study of organizational problems in 22 years; many of the recommendations in the first, the Hoover Commission of 1949, are still to be implemented.

There are differing views among specialists on foreign policy as to how to cure the malaise. Most share a common theme: The flow of policy-making power to the White House is irreversible and, like it or not, the State Department will have to adjust more fully to that fact to become more effective.

*Tomorrow: The White House in command.*

# Roster of U.S. Agencies Abroad

Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, Jan. 17—In 1781 the Continental Congress established a Department of Foreign Affairs, the progenitor of the State Department, to carry out "all correspondence and business" with other nations. It was authorized to hire "one or more clerks."

Since then two score agencies have gotten into the act. Each has personnel attached to United States embassies abroad, reporting through separate channels to different department heads, who compete with the Washington bureaucracy for the ear of the White House. The result, in the words of a recent State Department report, is a set of "incredibly numerous, frequently parochial, often overlapping and occasionally conflicting" interests in the Government. The agencies with resident personnel overseas include the following:

American Battle Monuments Commission	Housing and Urban Development Department
Agency for International Development	Immigration and Naturalization Service
Agriculture Department	Interior Department
Atomic Energy Commission	Internal Revenue Service
Bureau of Narcotics and Dangerous Drugs	Justice Department
Central Intelligence Agency	Labor Department
Commerce Department	Maritime Administration
Customs Department	National Aeronautics and Space Administration
Defense Department	National Science Foundation
Environmental Science Services Administration	Peace Corps
Export-Import Bank	Public Health Service
Federal Aviation Administration	Smithsonian Institution
Federal Bureau of Investigation	State Department
Foreign Agriculture Service	Tennessee Valley Authority
General Services Administration	Transportation Department
Health, Education and Welfare Department	Treasury Department
	United States Information Agency
	United States Travel Service
	Veterans Administration