Foreign Policy: Kissinger at Hub

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Following is the second in a series of articles exploring the Nixon Administration's style in foreign policy and the President's relationship with his staff and with Government institutions:

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WASHINGTON, Jan. 18—A Harvard professor named Henry A. Kissinger cursed his luck when Richard M. Nixon defeated Nelson A. Rockefeller for the Presidential nomination at the 1968 Republican convention in Miami.

Friends recall that Mr. Kissinger, then Governor Rockefeller's chief expert on foreign policy, spoke with a tart, partisan bitterness about Mr. Nixon. He was sharply critical of what he felt were the nominee's vague and elusive policy pronouncemetns and was worried that Mr. Nixon would be unable to lead the nation out of Vietnam.

Associated Press

Henry A. Kissinger with President Nixon, for whom he has become the most articulate spokesman on policy.

Yet Mr. Kissinger has become the instrument by which President Nixon has centralized the management of foreign policy in the White House as never before—much as Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara once centralized control over the competing bureaucracies of the Pentagon.

In the process the President's brilliant and generally hard-line special assistant for national-security affairs has emerged not only as his most influential foreign-policy adviser but also as a natural ally in outlook and strategy. It is a far cry from Miami.

The President, who holds the final determinations on foreign policy firmly in his own hands, decided to concentrate responsibility at the White House. He then gave Mr. Kissinger authority to operate virtually as a super-Cabinet officer managing the sprawling foreign-affairs community

Mr. Nixon assumed office determined to take charge of foreign policy and not to leave it to the diplomats. He shunned the Eisenhower pattern of having the Cabinet departments forge grand compromises and present him with a single recommended course of action, leaving him no choice but approval or disapproval. He wanted more "options."

In the 1968 campaign he declared his intention to purge the State Department and recast it more to his own liking. Once elected, he chose instead to leave the department in a secondary position and to build up the foreign-policy machinery of the White House.

The results are now clear.

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The Administration's tactics may continue to evolve, but its pattern of doing business is set—it is a Nixon-Kissinger pattern.

Mr. Kissinger is the pivotal figure. So well schooled is he in international affairs that conceptual planning on most major issues centers on him and his staff of 110. His understnding of geopolitics makes him the most articulate, and most frequently used, spokesman for policy, albeit through the anonymous pronouncements of "a White House official."

Active Hand in Diplomacy

Despite his initial reluctance. Mr. Kissinger takes an increasingly active hand in diplomacy, seeing a select group of important foreign visitors, meeting with the most prestigious ambassadors and troubled Senators and, on rare occasions, handling sensitive negotiations. He gets actively engaged, checks with the President and reports back to him fully.

The departments, jealous of what they consider their prerogatives, often complain about White House "usurping," but White House officials insist that this is the way the President wants it.

The net effect of the system has been to provide more orderly policy formulation on some issues—highly indicate proposals for the negotations with the Russians on strategic arms, for example. Conversely, in areas where neither the President nor his adviser has shown great personal interest, such as foreign ecnomic poliy, there is serious disarray.

The White House has not done as much long-range planning as it hoped. Inevitably, much time and energy have been spent reaching to crises or trying to clear away inherited debris—winding down the Vietnam war and preventing an explosion in the Middle East.

Nonetheless, the system has given Mr. Nixon a sufficient grip on policy so that he has not been forced into major decisions by sheer bureaucratic momentum or high pressure from any quarter. There has been no repetition of President John F. Kennedy's Bay of Pigs disaster.

Invitable Atom-Age Shift

In the nuclear age it was virtually inevitable that power would drift from the State Department to the White House. Any President wants to assert ultimate command in moments of crisis and on key issues. To reconcile the positions of 40-odd agencies dealing in foreign affairs, he needs his own foreign-policy staff. The pattern had already emerged in previous Administrations; the Nixon Administration has brought about significant change.

In the architecture of government, the pillars of the new centralism are a rejuvenated National Security Council buttressed by a network of interagency committees designed—and all headed—by Mr. Kissinger. They inject the White House deep into the development of policy on defense and intelligence matters as well as on diplomacy.

In the more intangible currency of influence in this capital, the change is demonstrated by Mr. Kissinger's reputation — in the Government, Congress, the press and among the embassies—as a more powerful figure than either Secretary of State William P. Rogers or Secretary of Defense Melvin R. Laird. None of his predecessors enjoyed such a reputation.

In the personal trappings of

status, the symbols include his emergence from a White House basement office to bright, swank, Hilton-style quarters on the ground floor near the President's Oval Office. There he directs his growing staff, which is considerably bigger than those of his predecessors.

In protocol, a secretary said jokingly, Mr. Kissinger comes "just below God"—a jibe at his ego as well as his power.

Nixon Style and Personality

Why has he become so central to the Administration's pattern of operation? Primarily because of the style and personality of President Nixon, most important his determination to take the policy lead himself and his feeling that foreign affairs is his strong suit.

"When it comes to foreign policy," he said during the 1968 campaign, "I have strong convictions about the necessity for strengthening the United States, dealing with the Soviet Union from a position of strength and negotiating, where we can, a reduction of those tensions that might lead to war." He needed an experienced aide to give intellectual structure and diplomatic content to those broad desires.

As a man who often prefers private reflection and reading on foreign policy to debate at moments of decision, Mr. Nixon is drawn to the sharply reasoned analysis that a scholar like Mr. Kissinger can provide him.

Mr. Nixon has always been a very private man. Whether deciding on the prosecution of Alger Hiss two decades ago, when he was in Congress, or on possible American intervention in the Jordanian crisis last September, he has usually drawn on a small circle of advisers. As President he holds the great bureaucracies at arm's length and deals with them through White House aides. That puts a premium on Mr. Kissinger.

In his passion for orderly consideration of foreign policy, the President has found a kindred spirit in Mr. Kissinger. In the early months of the Administration, Mr. Nixon was fond of announcing that he would consider the Middle East at a National Security Council meeting on Wednesday, Vietnam the following Tuesday, and so on. Mr. Kissinger's Teutonic mind and keen sense of organization suited that approach.

'My Schedule Is Full'

He used to joke, "There can't be a crisis next week because my schedule is already full."

For all the orderliness, Mr. Nixon's handling of foreign affairs is also episodic. While the crisis in Cambodia was building up early last April, he was concentrating on the battle over his nomination of G. Harrold Carswell to the Supreme Court. Suddenly, in mid-April, he became seized with the Cambodian situation, and some felt he was neglecting the Soviet buildup in the Middle East. By the end of June that situation preoccupied him.

The pattern increases the need for an aide like Mr. Kissinger to serve as the President's proxy for all those affairs that he cannot watch at the moment.

The central role of Mr. Kissinger also reflects his extraordinary grasp of international relations and his mastery of bureaucratic politics as well as the remarkable rapport between him and his boss. If the system has become overcentralized, it is because of a lack of counterpoise in a forceful, experienced Secretary of State and in a strong foreign-policy arm in the Pentagon.

Mr. Kissinger's influence with the President derives less from organizational position than from sheer power of intellect as well as from their unexpected affinity of view. His generally conservative, 19th-century, balance-of-power approach and his acute sense of the superpower rivalry with the Soviet Union are much more compatible with the President's outlook than are Secretary Roger's more dovish instincts.

Their compatibility has surprised Mr. Kissinger, who had not met Mr. Nixon when he made his critical comments in Miami. "We were strangers," he said subsequently.

Bypassing the Secretary

Mr. Nixon and Mr. Kissinger reacted more sharply than Mr. Rogers last summer to increased Soviet military involvement in the Middle East and to apparent Soviet efforts to build a submarine facility at Cienfuegos, Cuba. When Mr. Rogers took a restrained view of the Cuban situation, the President had Mr. Kissinger deal directly with the Russians.

During the early weeks of the Administration, the Secretary of State urged a cease-fire in Vietnam, but Mr. Kissinger, endorsing military judgments, thought it too risky then and held it off for 18 months.

He has opposed rapid withdrawal from Vietnam—an "elegant bugout" is his derisive term—because he fears that it would embolden the Soviet Union elsewhere and undermine confidence in the United States.

The decision to send American troops into Cambodia last spring, perhaps the most controversial made by the Nixon Administration, was by all accounts very much a personal decision by the President. Nonetheless, Mr. Kissinger, concerned with the impact abroad of the effective use of American power, was reportedly more in sympathy with it, despite some initial misgivings, than was Secretary Rogers, who was apprehensive of the political backlash.

On control of strategic arms Mr. Rogers pushed for early negotiations and the State Department advocated a ban on multiple-warhead missiles without requiring on-site American inspection in the Soviet Union to enforce the ban. Mr. Kissinger reportedly joined the Pentagon in resisting that approach.

He has not always prevailed, however. President Nixon has generally followed Mr. Rogers's lead on the Arab-Israeli dispute (Mr. Kissinger, a Jew, has deliberately held back). In December Mr. Nixon adopted the Rogers position that American ground troops would not be sent back into Cambodia. Mr. Kissinger had maintained that ambiguity would leave the enemy uncertain.

Generally, however, the President and his adviser have adapted so well that it is difficult to tell where Mr. Nixon's views end and Mr. Kissinger's begin. Both have felt the need for retrenchment abroad, yet each has a keen sense of challenge and danger in the world and the need for exercising power—even suddenly, as in Cambodia—to keep enemies in check.

Commitment to World Order

If President Nixon's wariness arises from an instinctive, almost ideological, anti-Communism, Mr. Kissinger's derives from a commitment to international order. He sees the world as a global chessboard on which the Soviet-American competition is played. A gain or setback anywhere affects the entire relationship, in his view, so one must demonstrate strength.

As the stocky German-born security adviser has risen in the White House, he has become something of a celebrity too. Charming and quick to poke fun at himself, he is a great source of gossip in a monotone Administration. As a 47-year-old divorcé, he makes society news by squiring such glamour girls as Gloria Steinem in New York, Joanna Barnes and Jill St. John in Hollywood and Barbara Howar in Washington.

Power, he has observed, "is the great aphrodisiac."

His social gloss coexists with deep insecurity and a wry sense of detachment. His conversation is spiced with jokes about "my paranoia" and "my megalomania." When a reporter appeared for an interview, he remarked: "I don't know why I'm cooperating in my own assassination."

Colleagues find him a demanding taskmaster—"incurably competitive and better than the competition," said one. His pace, often a 15-hour day, has burned out younger men. Of 28 original staff aides, 18 have departed—some over policy disputes, some from exhaustion, some from frustration.

Foreigners Take the Cue

Since the President has invested Mr. Kissinger with immense authority, foreigners have caught on and take their business to him.

In December the Chilean Ambassador, Domingo Santa Maria, was preparing to depart and informed Secretary Rogers and Charles A. Meyer, Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs, that he would like to pay a farewell call on the President.

As the Ambassador later described the incident, the State Department told him that Mr. Nixon was too busy. Saying farewell to Mr. Kissinger, the Ambassador commented that it was a shame Mr. Nixon had been unable to see him. "That's because you were talking to the wrong people," said Mr. Kissinger. In a few days the Ambassador had an appointment.

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Himself constantly with the President, Mr. Kissinger sits in on virtually every meeting with other officials or foreign statesmen. Almost daily—frequently three or four times a day—he sees Mr. Nixon alone. Sometimes they will converse for an hour or so on world trends.

Hardly a proposal of consequence on foreign affairs reaches the President without Mr. Kissinger's covering memo giving his analysis of the problem, the proposals of other agencies and his recommendation.

Occasionally a Cabinet officer deliberately bypasses the security adviser. Last summer Secretary Laird anticipated an over-all deficit of $18-billion that would force cutbacks in military manpower. Rather than let the White House get involved in how this would be done, he went to the President with a proposal for roughtly equal cutbacks in the three services.

Network of Committees

Normally, major issues rise up through a complex network of committees controlled by Mr. Kissinger. He triggers the process by issuing an N.S.S.M.—national security study memorandum—a probing questionnaire that sets out the problem and requests policy options.

The replies are sifted through layers of interagency working groups. Mr. Kissinger and his staff drive and direct the process, quizzing, prodding, summoning, coordinating and running the traffic.

To cross-check other agencies, Mr. Kissinger often develops his own channels. Every three to six months he sends a team to scour Vietnam. In Cambodia, he has a special White House representative reporting directly. Recently a staff specialist spent a month doing detailed studies of allied forces in Europe.

The Pentagon and other agencies chafe at such intrusion. Last month David Packard, Deputy Secretary of Defense, clashed with Mr. Kissinger over some recommendations drafted by his staff in N.S.S.M. 99: American objectives in Southeast Asia and Vietnam over the next five years. At an interagency meeting. Mr. Packard accused Mr. Kissinger of failing to obtain proposals from the American command in Saigon.

"There's no point in discussing this without their recommendations," Mr. Packard is said to have declared. Mr. Kissinger reportedly shot back: "Well, if there's no point in discussing it, let's not waste everyone's time." And he walked out.

'Closed Shop' at White House

Other fairly senior officials contend that the White House cuts in on their business and then operates like a "closed shop," excluding them out. Outsiders worry that the President may be too isolated.

Indeed, at times of crisis the number of active policy advisers shrinks drastically. The inner circle includes Mr. Kissinger, Secretaries Rogers and Laird, Attorney General John Mitchell, Adm. Thomas H. Moorer, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and Richard Helms, Director of Central Intelligence.

Well-placed officials assert that at sensitive moments in the Cambodian operation the White House excluded so many officials normally involved in Southeast Asian affairs that the staff work on some facets of the American attack was inadequate. They cite the Administration's subsequent surprise at the vehemence of the domestic reaction and the President's televised statements that the enemy headquarters was about to be captured.

In Congress, critics complain that with power so concentrated in the White House, the two most important makers of foreign policy — the President and Mr. Kissinger — are beyond the reach of Congress. Mr. Kissinger is shielded from Congressional inquiry by executive privilege.

In devising a system, the problem for President Nixon—for any President—is to find a way to chart his own course and then goad the massive Federal establishment to respond to his will.

President Dwight D. Eisenhower used a highly structured National Security Council process but, in fact, left policy formulation in many matters to his Secretary of State, John Foster Dulles.

The Kennedy White House operated with more open, less systematic style, drawing not only Cabinet officers but assistant secretaries of state and senior diplomats into the top-level policy debates—something that rarely happens in the Nixon Administration. Moreover, not just one but several White House aides dealt with foreign policy, providing several avenues to Mr. Kennedy.

Outsiders Rarely Tapped

President Lyndon B. Johnson also drew on a highly personal set of advisers, some from outside the Government, rather than a structured system. Mr. Nixon rarely uses outside advisers.

Those who have observed him at close range say he not only reads policy advice carefully but also draws out his advisers effectively at National Security Council meetings. "He goes around the room, one by one—Rogers, Laird, Moorer, the others, Mitchell, whoever is there," a participant related. "Kissinger outlines the issues at the beginning but never gives a recommendation at those meetings."

The arguments are often lengthy but rarely as spirited as in the Kennedy Administration. Nonetheless, the known disagreements among Mr. Nixon's advisers suggest that he is not cut off from dissenting views.

The appearance of isolation arises from his standoffish dealings with the bureaucracy and the great stock he puts in Mr. Kissinger's advice, rendered privately after all the others have spoken.

"Nixon may hear all the options," a shrewd bureaucrat commented, "but he seems to listen most of the time to one voice."

Tomorrow: The Pentagon and the Administration