

Foreign Policy: Pentagon Also Encounters Rebuffs

Following is the fourth in a series of articles exploring the Nixon Administration's style in foreign policy:

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WASHINGTON, Jan. 20— Though the Defense Department remains the largest, richest and most formidable Government agency, it, like other agencies, has lost to the Nixon White House some of its influence on foreign policy.

Senior military men have the satisfaction of sitting as equals on all major policy boards with civilian leaders of the Pentagon, the State Department and the Central Intelligence Agency. They get their views directly to the President, unfiltered by civilians. But those views are rejected by the President as often as they are accepted.

While President Lyndon B. Johnson was jealous of the prerogatives of Presidential power, he usually took pains to invoke military support for his tough decisions, whether on Vietnam force levels or on the kind of antimissile missile he wanted to build. President Nixon, in contrast, seldom seems to feel the need for a public military endorsement of his actions.

Even when the Defense Department can present a united front of civilian and military planners pushing a project, the White House has shown no reluctance to impose its own

Continued on Page 12, Column 1

Continued From Page 1, Col. 2

solution. Mr. Nixon overruled the Joint Chiefs of Staff when they argued against the unilateral elimination of stocks of biological weapons.

He overruled them again when they urged that the Russians be offered a package proposal on nuclear-arms control that would not prevent construction of a full 12-site Safeguard antimissile system; the offer, instead, was either for no missile defense or for one limited to protecting only the capitals of the Soviet Union and the United States.

Moreover, on at least two occasions when the military chiefs prevailed on a major policy matter at the White House, it was in counseling restraint on a President inclined toward bold action.

That happened in the spring of 1969, following the shooting down of an unarmed spy plane off the coast of North Korea, when the military stressed the paucity of forces available in the face of Mr. Nixon's initial inclination to bomb some North Korean airfields. As the military slowly moved air and sea reinforcements toward Korea, his anger cooled and he decided against retaliatory raids.

During the recent Jordanian crisis, after hundreds of Syrian tanks had gone into Jordan to support the Palestinian guerrillas against the troops of King Hussein, the Joint Chiefs, supported by officials of the State and Defense Departments, urged caution lest a misstep trigger a confrontation with the Soviet Union.

On the other hand, on issues in which the White House, for strategic reasons, was receptive to tough options offered by the military for essentially tactical reasons — as in the case of the Cambodian invasion and the heavy bomb strikes on air-defense sites and supply dumps in North Vietnam — hard-line military policy was supported.

An Impression Unsupported

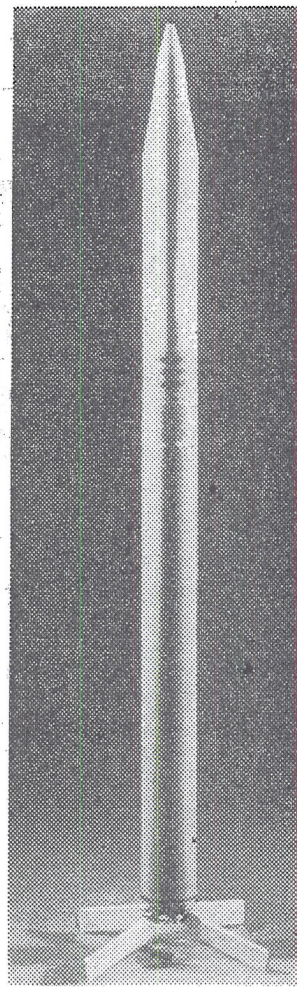
Mr. Nixon's stand has sometimes given rise to the impression that military men are in the ascendancy. Early last month, after two intensive air strikes on North Vietnam and a commando-type raid on a prisoner-of-war camp near Hanoi, Senator J. W. Fulbright asserted that the Pentagon was "taking over the primary role in our foreign policy."

Since those hard-line actions seemed to break a pattern of more than a year's duration in which the Administration appeared to be fulfilling its pledge of negotiation rather than confrontation, the Arkansas Democrat's allegation may have struck a responsive chord around the nation.

However, it prompted a ranking Administration official to say that he had missed the point on the ground that it is not that the Pentagon has "inordinate influence on our foreign policy but rather that the Administration is itself more inclined to a hard-line bias in its decision-making."

An assessment of the policy position and influence of military and civilian Defense Department leaders in the foreign-policy arena makes it clear that the stereotypes of hawks in the Pentagon and doves elsewhere no longer prevail. Nowadays a variety of shifting alliances in the Administration sometimes pair the Joint Chiefs and the State Department against the Pentagon's civilian leaders; at other times civilians are arrayed against the military; then again, key White House staff men may be pushing for bold moves, against opposition from the diplomats and the military leaders.

To gain some insight into the considerable shift of Pentagon influence in foreign policy, one



United Press International

An M-55 nerve-gas rocket. Though Chiefs of Staff argued against the elimination of biological arms, President Nixon prevailed.

must turn to the beginning of the nineteen sixties, when Robert S. McNamara was John F. Kennedy's Secretary of Defense. The Pentagon of Secretary Melvin R. Laird is vastly different, in style and substance, from the establishment molded over a seven-year period by Mr. McNamara, who stayed through most of Mr. Johnson's Presidency.

Brilliant But Abrasive

Mr. McNamara, a brilliant but abrasive manager, organized a team of bright young civilian analysts who helped him take decision-making from the armed services and the Joint Chiefs and centralize it in his office. In the process the views of military men were consistently brushed aside, or so the military felt.

With the notable exception of Vietnam strategy, Mr. McNamara succeeded in gaining virtual autonomy over policy decisions, even those with large foreign - policy implications. And in a world in which the United States has commitments to more than 40 countries, there is little the Pentagon does or contemplates that lacks ramifications abroad.

It was Secretary McNamara rather than the President or the Secretary of State who each January published a "posture statement" outlining worldwide problems and how the United States intended to deal with them.

Into that setting stepped Mr. Laird, a smooth, politically shrewd Congressman from Wisconsin who had gained his knowledge of defense matters during more than a decade on the House Military Appropriations Subcommittee.

He de-emphasized the importance of civilian analysts and returned to the military a substantial role in the making of defense policy. Although he cut billions from the defense budget, to which Mr. McNamara had added billions, he won the regard of the brass because they felt like full partners in the hard choices required by shrinking budgets.

One reason for the relationship is the mutual respect and warmth between the Defense Secretary and the Joint Chiefs

that was obviously lacking on both sides during the McNamara era.

Nonetheless, Mr. Laird has retained a principal planning innovation of Mr. McNamara's: dividing the budget among the major military missions that must be fulfilled, not among the armed services as such. The first decision on, say, strategic missiles is how many are needed and of what kind, and only then is it determined how much money will go to the various missile programs.

There is no doubt that civilian control continues at the Pentagon. Secretary Laird and Deputy Secretary David Packard make the final decisions on such questions as whether to develop and build a Navy fighter or an Army tank and on the number of combat divisions and aircraft carriers that will be maintained as the military establishment shrinks.

Under Mr. McNamara and his successor, Clark M. Clifford, it was civilian analysts who formulated the options, with the military coming in later on rebuttal; now the military initiate specific proposals on how the defense pie will be cut, with civilian analysts making their comments before ultimate decision.

During the long tenure of Mr. McNamara and the briefer one of Mr. Clifford, the Office of International Security Affairs — roughly 300 specialists who advise the Secretary of Defense on foreign policy — included some of the brightest and most assertive officials in Washington.

Laird Urged Pullout

Now, according to people in other agencies who deal with them, the current staff, with a few notable exceptions, is weaker. A senior State Department official commented: "In the McNamara era State dealt with I.S.A. because that's where the strong men were at Defense. Now we tend more and more to deal with the Joint Staff and the services."

On the large stage of policy, Mr. Laird has chosen a limited number of key positions and lobbied hard for their acceptance, both in the Administration and in Congress.

One was his insistence that, in addition to the stress by the White House and State Department on trying to persuade Saigon and Hanoi to come to a

negotiated settlement, the United States move toward large-scale troop withdrawals from Vietnam and equip the South Vietnamese to take over their own fight, even in the absence of agreement in Paris.

Despite initial resistance from Henry A. Kissinger, the President's national-security adviser, Mr. Laird's plan was adopted as part of what came to be known in the Administration as the dual-track approach to ending the war. With the growing disillusionment over the Paris negotiations, Mr. Laird's program has increasingly assumed center stage in strategy.

To insure that the military men, many of whom were initially unenthusiastic about "unilateral" withdrawal, would not drag their feet, Mr. Laird established the practice of meeting daily with the interservice team charged with carrying out what came to be known as Vietnamization.

He was aware that if the military did not like a program, they sometimes assigned second-rate officers to carry it out. In this case the services have assigned some of their brightest, most imaginative officers to Vietnamization, as they have to the program for an all-volunteer armed force, which many military men also have doubts about.

Successful Resistance

To date, at least, Mr. Laird has successfully resisted an attempt to take from the Pentagon decisions on such matters as the number of aircraft carriers to be maintained and what new strategic bomber to build and to turn them over to a special White House committee chaired by Mr. Kissinger.

The panel, the Defense Programs Review Committee, was set up to apply a blend of political, economic and diplomatic assessments to defense budgeting and force levels. In practice its principal role has been to work out broad budgetary guidance, and little else.

Even in those selective instances when Secretary Laird makes a determined fight, he loses battles too. Some weeks ago, in an effort to save money and to mollify growing Congressional pressure for substantial reductions in the American force of nearly 300,000 men in Western Europe, he urged

that 20,000 to 40,000 supply troops be brought home. Despite the fact that an extensive interdepartmental study was under way, he made a direct appeal to the President.

Determined opposition was mounted by the State Department — with Secretary of State William P. Rogers sending a special memo to the President to counter the Laird visit — by the Joint Chiefs and by some White House staff experts. They believed that reductions at this juncture might undermine confidence in the United States' resolve to defend Europe and might lead to snowballing troop reductions by members of the Atlantic alliance, further weakening an already dubious defense posture. President Nixon decided against force reductions for the balance of his current term.



United Press International

Sending U.S. forces into Cambodia was a move on which White House and Pentagon agreed. Melvin R. Laird pressed withdrawal of U.S. troops from South Vietnam, below.



Associated Press

On another major issue—the supply of additional F-4 long-range fighter-bombers to Israel — political considerations prevailed despite a solid negative stand by Pentagon civilian and military experts. A decision to provide the jets, though far fewer than had been requested, was made by Mr. Nixon.

“By keeping down the number of planes,” an official explained, “we not only frustrate potentially ambitious offensive plans but we maintain future leverage since we know Israel will be back for more.”

Though the popular view may type represents the military as a consistently bellicose lobby in moments of crisis, their demeanor in the recent Jordanian crisis demonstrates otherwise. The Joint Chiefs, in solid phalanx with Defense and State Department leaders, kept reminding the President of the dangers of a misstep.

In an effort to put pressure on Syria to remove her tanks from Jordan and to persuade the Soviet Union that the United States was increasing its options for possible action, a decision was made to mount a dramatic show of force.

Troops were alerted in

U.S. Colonel in Saigon Faces Marijuana Trial

SAIGON, South Vietnam, Jan. 20 (UPI)—A United States Air Force colonel is to be tried by general court-martial Feb. 8 on marijuana charges, Air Force spokesmen announced today.

The spokesmen said the colonel, believed to be the highest ranking officer to be held on marijuana charges here, was charged with use and possession of marijuana, and “solicitation for illegal transfer” of the drug.

They identified him as Col. Gerald V. Kehrl, 46 years old, of Willmar, Minn., who commanded a detachment of the Military Airlift Command at Tansonnhut Air Base outside Saigon.

Spokesmen were unable immediately to supply further details on Colonel Kehrl's arrest.

West Germany and the United States, a third aircraft carrier was rushed to the Mediterranean, a helicopter carrier, with Marine reinforcements, was also dispatched and transport

planes were moved forward to Turkey.

At the same time the President was warned that the alerted airborne brigade in West Germany was so short of trained men that it would make a poor choice if troops were required. Even the 82d Airborne Division, supposedly the best prepared “fast-reaction” unit in the United States, could muster only two of its three brigades because of manpower shortages. The Navy warned that in a showdown between the American and Soviet fleets in the Mediterranean, in which the Russians fired first, no clear assurances of the outcome could be given.

Despite the gloomy assessments, officials involved in around-the-clock White House meetings during the crisis say, Mr. Nixon was unwilling to rule out the direct use of force.

“He would not rule out the use of tactical air power at any stage,” a general recalled. “The decision to get a third carrier out there quickly was in part an attempt to keep that option open.”

Tomorrow: U.S. intelligence agencies under scrutiny.