

Kissinger vs. Press Strain Grows

By Tom Littlewood

WASHINGTON — (CST)

When national security advisor Henry Kissinger is riding on President Nixon's plane and wants to use the lavatory at the rear, he has to walk past the seats reserved for the press pool."

There isn't room for all the reporters, so a pool of five is chosen by the White House on a rotating basis to represent the others. One newspaper correspondent is assigned to the pool, which share its news with the others in the press party riding on other planes.

Returning from the Azores Tuesday, pool member David Kraslow, Washington bureau chief of the Los Angeles Times, thought it would be helpful if Kissinger clarified the two days of discussions with French President Georges Pompidou.

'Deep Background'

Kissinger agreed.

At his request, part of the discussion was to be "deep background": That is, the information could not be attributed to any Administration official by name.

Later, a typewritten summary of his remarks was presented to Kissinger for his editing. Some minor revisions were made.

It was in this fashion that the other correspondents were informed later that Kissinger had said not for attribution, that "if the Russians continue to deliberately encourage military actions (by India in Pakistan), a new look might have to be taken at the President's summitry plans."

Abuse of Tactic

The use of "backgrounders" by government officials who want to circulate their views without assuming responsibility for them is a sore point among journalists. Many of them feel the system

has been abused by the Nixon Administration on grave issues involving world peace.

Last week, Kissinger conducted a long "background" explanation of U.S. policy toward India and Pakistan. A statement that was later reprinted in the Congressional Record by Sen. Barry Goldwater (R-Ariz.), who named the source.

After Tuesday's pool reports had been mimeographed and circulated, the Washington Post published a story yesterday identifying

Kissinger as saying that the President "may reconsider his forthcoming trip to Moscow unless the Russians exercise a restraining influence" in the war. A brief note explained that "the Washington Post was not part of the reporters' pool and learned Kissinger's identity independently."

Reporter Furious

Kraslow was furious. He asked to make a statement at White House press secretary Ronald Ziegler's morning news briefing yesterday. Kraslow accused the Post of engaging in "cheap, shoddy journalism" that raised "serious questions of journalistic ethics and behavior."

Ziegler then said the Post decision was contrary to "established practices" and "unacceptable" to the White House.

He said he would meet soon with officers of the White House Correspondents' Association to fix "very clear ground rules (relating to) information that comes off Air Force 1."

But the Post's executive editor, Benjamin C. Bradlee, said later that "we have engaged in this deception and done this disservice to the reader long enough." He

added that it was the Post's policy to view unattributed information with "skepticism and suspicion."

N.Y. Times View

The New York Times, which attributed the briefing to Kissinger in its later editions, took a similar view. Seymour Topping, assistant managing editor, said the non-attribution rule in the Kissinger briefing was "unacceptable in view of its importance."

Kraslow objected particu-

larly to "the implication that the information was dumped into our laps." Actually, he said, it was "elicited by the pool only under intensive questioning and requestioning of Kissinger."

Ziegler said the situation has gotten so that government officials aboard the plane feel hesitant about going to the lavatory or near the press section for fear that "they will be driven into an immediate press conference."