

Post Criticized for

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Presidential Press Secretary Ronald L. Ziegler and a Los Angeles Times correspondent criticized The Washington Post yesterday for revealing the source of official "background" statements regarding relations with the Soviet Union.

The article in question, in Wednesday's Post, identified presidential adviser Henry A. Kissinger as the source of a statement that the President may reconsider his forthcoming trip to Moscow unless the Russians exercise a restraining influence in the India-Pakistan conflict.

The Kissinger statement was made to five reporters in a "press pool" aboard the presidential plane returning from the Nixon-Pompidou talks in the Azores. Kissinger made his comments with the understanding that they could only be used by reporters without attribution to him or any administration official.

Ziegler said the Post story citing Kissinger as the source broke the ground rules of the encounter and "is unacceptable to the White House." He said he would begin consultations with the White House Correspondents Association, wire services and broadcast networks to establish clear "ground rules" for future situations, including interviews aboard the presidential plane.

David J. Kraslow, Washington bureau chief of the Los Angeles Times and a member of the Tuesday press pool, charged The Post with "unprofessional, unethical, cheap journalism" in citing Kissinger as the source. Kraslow said Kissinger's remarks were not "dumped in our lap" but were elicited by the reporters on the aircraft "under the most intensive kind of questioning" and only after they gave assurance to Kissinger that he would not be identified as the source.

Benjamin C. Bradlee, executive editor of The Washington Post, defended the newspaper's handling of the story and said The Post is drawing up a set of guidelines concerning "background briefings." Bradlee said it was common knowledge that Kissinger was the source of the statements — which were reported in various ways by major newspapers, wire services and networks yesterday — but that the "ground rules" kept this information from the reader.

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Identifying Kissinger

Referring to attributed information from officials at background briefings, Bradlee said, "We are convinced that we have engaged in this deception and done this disservice to the reader long enough." He said the policy of The Post shall be "to make every reasonable effort to attribute information to its source" and to view attributed information with "skepticism and suspicion."

In presidential travel and in some other situations, a small group of journalists known as the press "pool" customarily accompanies the Chief Executive. Their job is make sure that some reporters are with the President in all public situations, and to pass along anything they learn to the entire press corps.

The five-member press pool for Tuesday—chosen by the White House—left the Azores on Mr. Nixon's jet. The 88 other members of the traveling White House press corps—including British, Canadian, Danish, French, German, Italian, Japanese, Swedish and Swiss journalists—remained behind for three hours to file their stories on Mr. Nixon's meeting with Pompidou.

In flight over the Atlantic in the presidential plane, Kissinger came back to the aft compartment occupied by the press pool. There under questioning he made the statements about the United States' attitude regarding the Soviet position in the South Asia conflict. A summary of his remarks was then composed by members of the press pool and sent forward to Kissinger's compartment for his approval. The President travels in another compartment of the plane, but Ziegler said yesterday Mr. Nixon was aware of Kissinger's meeting with the press pool.

The portion of Kissinger's remarks concerning U. S.-Soviet relations was marked on the pool report to "be written on our own without attribution to any administration official." Shortly after the presidential jet landed, major wire services distributed "urgent" stories on the matter.

The Associated Press reported that "President Nixon may reassess his plans for a historic journey to Moscow, it is understood, unless the Soviet Union begins to exercise a restraining influence in the India-Pakistan war." United Press International said "President Nixon will re-examine the Washington-Moscow thaw and his planned spring trip to Moscow if Russia continues to encourage India's military drive against Pakistan, it was understood Tuesday. The AP and UPI reporters were members of the pool.

The CBS Evening News re-

ported that Mr. Nixon "let it be known tonight" that he might re-examine Soviet-American relations if Russia does not restrain India. The NBC Nightly News attributed the warning to "the Nixon administration." The ABC News said "it's reported" that the President may take a new look at his plan to visit Moscow.

By the time press secretary Ziegler and the bulk of the press corps landed here in two charter jets about 7:30 p.m., the stories mentioned above had been widely disseminated. The pool report had not been given to the traveling press corps in flight, as is often the case, because of communications difficulties.

Shortly after landing, Ziegler began issuing statements

on-the-record denying that any U.S. official was suggesting that Mr. Nixon was considering cancellation of his trip to Russia. (Kissinger had said the President might consider a change in summit plans; he did not say the President was already considering it.)

The Washington Post established that Kissinger was the source of the stories which were being reported on all news wires and networks, and identified him as such. Executive Editor Bradlee said he made the decision at 8 p.m. Tuesday.

The New York Times informed the White House in early evening that it would attribute the Kissinger statements to "a high White House

official." The Times did so in its early editions and in later editions quoted Kissinger by name on the basis of public attribution by The Post.

Seymour Topping, assistant managing editor of The Times, said that paper's policy is to seek the greatest possible attribution but make its judgment on every story on an "ad hoc" basis. Topping said the non-attribution rule in the case of Tuesday's Kissinger story was "unacceptable" in view of the importance and nature of the material.

The question of "background briefings" — in which information is given the press on the condition that the source not be identified—has been controversial among

Washington journalists for many years. Bradlee said yesterday that Post reporters and editors had become increasingly concerned about use and abuse of unattributed information over the last five years.

When Kissinger began his "background" talk aboard Air Force One on Tuesday afternoon, he was reminded that another of his recent back-grounders had become public when it was inserted into the Congressional Record by Sen. Barry Goldwater. Kissinger appeared to be irritated about that incident, and remarked—ironically as it turned out—that the purpose of doing the briefing "on background" was to prevent inflaming of the issue.