



Murrey Marder

The State Department

"Some friction" is bound to exist between the White House national security adviser and the State Department, President Nixon finally has said with refreshing candor.

A degree of friction and "competition," the President went on to say in his recent interview, "is not unhealthy," because out of constructive competition more effective foreign policy can emerge. Indeed it can.

The reality, however, is that there has been friction without competition be-

tween the White House and State Department for nearly three years. The State Department virtually has been out of the game since Elliot L. Richardson left as State's No. 2 man to become Secretary of the Department of Health, Education and Welfare in June, 1970.

AT THE START of the Nixon administration there was an outside chance that the foreign policy-making offices might function constructively with dynamic Henry A. Kissinger at the White House and genial Bill Rogers at State, if State had a strong man to run the department with Rogers serving, as the role has been described, as the President's trusted chief lawyer in foreign affairs.

Kissinger and Richardson, who comes out of the Boston brahmin strain of intellectualism, respected each other, worked together well. State was hopeful of developing an institutional input in shaping policy, with no question, of course, about who was on top. The National Security Council web of authority across the government was controlled, as President Nixon intended, in the White House, with Kissinger holding the strings.

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Rogers was not a nonentity. Indeed, his non-ideological outlook on the world probably was far more supportive of President Nixon's turnaround on U.S. policy toward China, and the general abandonment of "confrontation" in place of "negotiation," than ever has been credited to Rogers.

The vital No. 2 post at State vacated by Richardson was filled by Roger's nominee, John N. Irwin II. Rogers's wanted a quiet-working deputy; Irwin has been almost unnoticeable in the post of Under Secretary.

Rogers often has scoffed at the talk of "low morale" in the State Department, saying that has been claimed almost since the department came into exist-

ence. That is correct as a generality, but rarely to the point of the present dismay. Franklin D. Roosevelt often expressed despair with the State Department; John F. Kennedy called it "a bowl of jelly," and so on.

The Nixon administration entered office, with a double legacy of suspicion. President Nixon was Vice President in the Eisenhower administration, in which Rogers was Attorney General.

ROGERS ATTEMPTED to allay the mutual disquiet. He commissioned a soul-searching study with the department on the bureaucratic couch for self-analysis. It concluded, among other things, that "the role of top leadership in stimulating creativity is crucial." That is still true.

The State Department today has tumbled into despair. As one official said in the depths of frustration, "We are something like *American Express*—but without its prestige."

Part of the slide was probably inevitable under President Nixon's style of operation, in which "so many initiatives . . . had to be undertaken at the presidential level."

The President's and Rogers' determination to prevent, above all, any State news "leaks," has succeeded admirably; the department rarely knows anything worth leaking. Top officials, for example, were humiliatedly unaware for years of the secret Kissinger-Le Duc Tho talks which began in 1969; even today most do not know what is in the draft Vietnamese peace plan, except for what is in the press.

Kissinger has told many associates he is very seriously concerned about the need to repair this damage in President Nixon's second term, and to help "institutionalize" the future conduct of foreign policy. It is ludicrous, Kissinger has said, to portray him, as some critics do, as "despising" the Foreign Service, for the majority of Kissinger's staff is drawn from it. So everyone, presumably, accepts the problem. All that is still needed is a solution.