Tom Braden

Who Is Making Foreign Policy?

Henry Kissinger

Fresh from his personal triumphs in the Mideast, Secretary of State Henry Kissinger now confronts another crisis, this one involving his leadership and authority. Kissinger is on a collision course with Secretary of Defense James R. Schlesinger.

The tip-off was Schlesinger's astonishing remark about military action against Arab states. At the very moment that Kissinger was in Cairo, trying to persuade President Sadat to sign the peace agreement, Schlesinger announced from Washington that if

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the Arab states continued their oil embargo military action might result. It was about as unhelpful a hint from home as Kissinger could have received.

But there is more trouble ahead, and the policy of detente with Russia may be at stake. While Kissinger was abroad, Schlesinger announced the retargeting of U.S. land-based missiles. Henceforth, he said, they would be aimed at Russian missile sites rather than at cities. The move will make the next step in the SALT talks exceedingly difficult, perhaps impossible, to negotiate.

An argument—and a very good argument—can be made for Schlesinger's move. Mr. Nixon has long deplored what he called his lack of options. In the event of a nuclear attack, he has had one choice and one choice only: to obliterate the Soviet Union or any city thereof. The shift in strategy will permit him another choice: to take out the Soviet missile system or any part of that system.

But the decision to make this option possible is not only subject to misinterpretation; it may vastly increase the arms race. From Kissinger's standpoint, the timing—with SALT talks imminent — could hardly have been worse.

Add to all this the revelation that Adm. Thomas Moorer, chairman of the the Pentagon had been receiving, without authorization, secret documents of Henry Kissinger and you have the makings of a very serious argument. Who is making foreign policy? The Secretary of Defense or the Secretary of State?

Kissinger does not like argument. In five years under Mr. Nixon he has managed to avoid having any. He did not have to argue with his predecessor, William P. Rogers, because he knew more than Rogers, prepared himself more thoroughly and was ready with initiatives and information when Rogers was not.

Nor did Kissinger argue with former Defense Secretary Melvin Laird, who frequently tried to undercut him with President Nixon. Kissinger's technique

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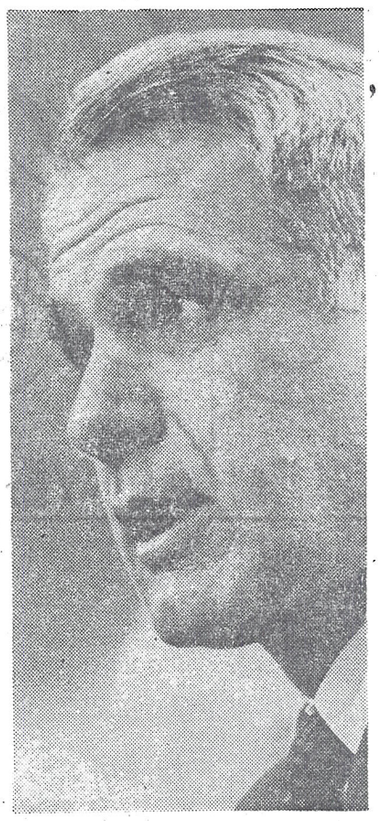

James Schlesinger

in handling Laird was to touch base with Laird's constituency in Congress before Laird did. Thus when Laird called friends on The Hill to complain of Kissinger's initiatives, he would find —more than once to his astonishment —that Mr. Nixon's aide had beaten him to the telephone, and that those whom he thought might complain for him had already been taken aboard.

But neither Rogers nor Laird really wanted a fight. Rogers liked this title more than his job, and Laird, a man of immense ability to see the other side of any question, was never certain that the generals and the admirals to whom he had been listening were right and that Kissinger was wrong.

Schlesinger appears to be made of different stuff.

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