

Mr. Nixon's Self-Isolation

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The last time President Nixon held a Cabinet meeting was on November 3 the day after his re-election victory.

The last time he held a meeting of the National Security Council was on May 3, the day he ordered the bombing of North Vietnamese harbors.

The most recent presidential news conference was October 5.

The only recent public statement

Mr. Nixon as delivered in person was on November 27 when he poked about his reorganization plans to reporters at Camp David but did not submit to questions.

Since the cessation of the Paris talks and resumption December 18 of the massive bombing attacks in the Hanoi-Haiphong area, Mr. Nixon has been almost totally isolated not only from the public but from most administration officials.

They are as much in the dark about his thinking, his plans and his expectations regarding Vietnam as the ordinary citizen.

CONGRESS

There is no record that in his latter period the President met with any member of Congress except Senate Minority Leader Hugh Scott (Rep-Pa.). There have been 10 White House staff meetings for the purpose of informing those aides of the President's thinking.

After Henry Kissinger returned from the Paris negotiations and reported to the President, Mr. Nixon in-

structed him also to report to Vice President Spiro Agnew, Secretary of State William Rogers, Secretary of Defense Melvin Laird, CIA Director Richard Helms, and Admiral Thomas H. Moorer, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

The President gave his order to resume the bombing at that time, but as far as can be learned he met in person only with Kissinger and General Alexander M. Haig Jr., deputy national security adviser.

MEETING

The President last met with Kissinger and Haig on December 22 in Key Biscayne, Fla., the day Haig returned from a quick trip to Southeast Asia. Then Kissinger and Haig went on vacation, but the President and Kissinger kept in close touch by telephone.

What concessions may have been made by Hanoi to Washington are known here only to the President, Kissinger and two or three other officials. The majority of members of the NSC staff are uninformed as to what happened.

Secrecy has become a presidential weapon and only the tip of the iceberg is ever apparent to the voters

in this democracy.

In an appreciation which Dean Acheson wrote several years ago for President Truman, the former secretary of state described how Mr. Truman reached his controversial decision to dismiss General of the Army Douglas MacArthur.

On April 6, 1951, the day after publication of MacArthur's famous letter criticizing the conduct of the Korean War, President Truman conferred with his senior foreign and defense advisers.

On April 9, with his civil and military advisers present, Mr. Truman "asked for our considered advice and listened without interruption" to his advisers, who unanimously recommended that he should remove MacArthur from his command.

"The President's self-dis-

cipline in making his decision created a solidly unified administration through what might have been a most critical period and which certainly was a trying one," Acheson wrote.

BACKING

Mr. Nixon has not gone through the unifying process in his latest decisions on Vietnam. Does he have full backing within the administration? He does not have full backing among Republicans on Capitol Hill.

The kind of consultative spadework which might have been expected could have saved the President the embarrassment of having Republican Senator William B. Saxbe of Ohio declare Mr. Nixon "appears to have lost his senses on this . . . I can't go along with him on this."

Saxbe is a member of the Senate Armed Services Committee which, among other things, must pass on the nomination of Elliot L. Richardson to be the next secretary of Defense. Yet Saxbe said he got no call from the White House about the President's bombing decision "and so far as I know neither did any other member of the committee."



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Now even Nixon appointees are complaining in private about the isolation and secrecy of the man who promised "an open administration."