

President's Style

Generalities, Not Specifics, Dot Speeches

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KEY BISCAYNE, Fla., July 4—Secretary of State Henry A. Kissinger told a news conference in Jerusalem at the end of President Nixon's visit there last month that the President's style in negotiations "is a very reflective style."

Mr. Nixon believes that his contribution is to "set a general direction" and to make sure the leaders with whom he is talking understand "our basic purposes," Kissinger said.

"In these meetings," the secretary added, "the President always attempts to make sure—and in my view does so very effectively—to put across to the leaders with whom he is talking, what the general purposes are of the United States.

"He then elicits from them a statement of the directions in which they want to go."

Presidential aides insist that Kissinger's description of the President's negotiating style is accurate and that Mr. Nixon is both reflective and pragmatic in his private discussions with foreign leaders.

They acknowledge that his is different in his public discussions, which, they concede, tend toward hyperbole and more to a discussion of ends than of means.

Mr. Nixon's speech to the nation Wednesday night from Loring Air Force Base in Maine—billed as a significant report on both his Middle East tour and his visit to Brussels and the Soviet Union—was a disappointment to those who expected him to give a report in depth, or to be reflective about the

problems the nation faces.

The setting for the President's address was an odd one. After his first Soviet summit in 1972 he flew by helicopter from Andrews Air Force base for a report to a joint session of Congress.

But this time a speech to Congress was ruled out on the grounds that he would be charged with indulging in impachment politics, and there was doubt whether congressional leaders would welcome a speech a few weeks before the House Judiciary Committee is scheduled to vote on a bill of impeachment.

Some other setting for a report was necessary, and Loring Air Force Base, almost on the direct route from Moscow to Washington and the first available landing spot on American soil, was chosen for a refueling stop and a televised address to the nation.

But an outdoor assemblage on a landing area is hardly the setting for a reflective report on complicated international issues. The President therefore was determined to keep his speech short—16 minutes—although the remainder of the 30-minute TV time was taken up with pictures of his plane arriving, of the warm greeting from the controlled crowd of spectators and from the hurriedly summoned Vice President.

The speech, as White House officials often say, was directed to the housewife in Peoria rather than to students of foreign policy. The purpose was not to explain a policy or elucidate a problem but to leave an impression.

In other words, as one White House official said on the occasion of a similar speech, the President is more concerned with the millions who see the picture on television than with the thousands who may read a newspaper report on the content of what he said.

Before the President left Moscow, Kissinger said at a news conference that Mr. Nixon and Soviet leader Leonid I. Brezhnev held "the most extensive discussions" two such leaders have ever held on the arms race. The

talks were conducted "with a frankness that would have been considered inconceivable two years ago," Kissinger said.

None of that came through in the President's report to the people, which was couched chiefly in generalities about his hopes for peace and progress. The President made no reference to Brezhnev's comment that their achievements in arms control "could, probably, be wider."

Nor did Mr. Nixon comment on any of the specific issues raised during his journey to the Middle East or on the terrible problems of poverty and overpopulation that threaten the area.

Even some of his closest associates acknowledge that he talks a great deal about his ambition for peace without explaining to the voters how he intends to achieve it.

In his long public career, he generally has tried to avoid specifics in public speeches and to appeal more to his listeners' hearts and passions than to their intellects. Observers often have noted how he avoids specific problems and talks about lofty hopes and aims.

Some presidential aides have complained that Mr. Nixon seldom uses his office as "a bully pulpit," as Theodore Roosevelt described it, or to educate and to inform on the issues. The presidential style may be reflective in meetings with other heads of government, but the emphasis in public speeches is to the eye and to the emotions more than to the ear and to the head.

It is partly explained by the President's deep-seated conviction that the mass of voters prefer the simple to the complex, the sweeping claim to the acknowledgment that some problems cannot be easily solved.

Members of the President's staff recognize that he may be underestimating the intelligence of today's voter, and they keep trying to get him to put more substance and less rhetoric into his speeches.