

Serious Trouble for Kissinger?

There are signs here that Secretary of State Henry Kissinger is in trouble, and that the trouble may be serious.

"It's not the 'plumbers.' It's a lot more difficult than that," said one highly placed White House source, and he added, "Henry's trouble is with the President."

This is not surprising. The Secretary of State's recent tour de force in the Mideast must have galled Mr. Nixon, if one can judge from the signals of his closest aides. At one point during the marathon shuttle diplomacy, presidential assistant Ron Ziegler let it be known that Mr. Nixon had spent much of a day drafting detailed instructions to Kissinger for the Syrian-Israeli border negotiations.

The notion that this kind of fine-line diplomacy could be conducted by cable is insane, but the fact that Ziegler suggested it is revealing. Mr. Nixon does not like to see his Secretary of State in a front-and-center role.

It will be recalled that leaked memoranda from the FBI greeted Kissinger immediately on his return so that, at his first press conference, reporters were forced to ask him not about his triumphs but about whether he had committed perjury. It may be said on absolute authority that Kissinger does not believe that those memoranda were leaked by the FBI.

So the ring seems to be closing in upon the one man in Mr. Nixon's entourage who clearly outranks him in

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national esteem. Presidential assistants Alexander Haig and Ziegler are jealous; Secretary of Defense James Schlesinger sees Kissinger as "soft" on Russia; Secretary of Treasury William Simon would like to have a freer hand to negotiate oil price reductions; from every side, the knives are out.

Some of this may be Kissinger's own fault. Since he became Secretary of State, he has neglected his fences. Those allusions, so customary in the days of Vietnam, to the President's wise guidance and to his own role as a mere runner of errands have been recently few.

"You only mentioned the President twice in that Paris press conference," Ziegler once said to the then-foreign policy aide. The remark annoyed Kissinger, who might have been better off to learn from it. Since that day, Mr. Nixon has faced the Watergate exposure, but the Watergate exposure has brought no change in the atmosphere of the Oval Office.

Moreover, Kissinger has insisted on total domination of foreign policy, and

he has insisted upon it even in areas where his own expertise was doubtful and where he might have let others take the limelight and the credit or the blame.

Such, for example, was the conference of oil-importing states held in Washington. Then-Secretary of Treasury George Shultz was probably better qualified to handle it, or then-energy chief William Simon. Neither might have saved it from the flop it proved to be, but the flop did not help Kissinger, who had insisted on sole ownership.

A few months ago, a presidential request for Kissinger's resignation would have been unthinkable. Public reaction might have been equivalent to that following the Saturday Night Massacre.

But today, the public has been hammered into grogginess. It no longer responds.

And even if a Kissinger resignation cost Mr. Nixon a few points in the polls, it would probably not affect 34 votes in the Senate. That is the only presidential constituency which matters right now.

"Kissinger Quits," the headlines would read. Would the departure of a man who favors detente with the Communists, is thought to be "soft" by the Joint Chiefs, is popular with the Eastern foreign policy establishment and was once a professor at Harvard seem outrageous to the Senate's right wing?

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