

Nixon Tells How He Ran Foreign Policy

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Former President Nixon said last night that Henry Kissinger was an intellectual giant but he also described the former secretary of state as moody, secretive, capable of "outrageous" private remarks and intensely protective of official prerogatives.

The former President said that he might have named John Connally to be secretary of state in 1973 but for an awareness that Kissinger "couldn't tolerate" such a threat to his primacy among foreign policy advisers.

Nixon's remarks about his closest diplomatic partner, some of them blunt and personal, occurred in the second of five planned television conversations with David Frost that mark the former President's emergence from post-Watergate seclusion.

In the nationally televised interview, Nixon discussed but did not offer significant new insights into his conduct of diplomacy with

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China and the Soviet Union and the impact of the superpowers on the Middle East and the Indian subcontinent.

Nixon was chatty and anecdotal, sometimes almost gossipy, as he described Mao Tse-tung as a shriveled colossus who knew last summer that "he was going to die."

Yet the refrain that ran throughout the telecast was Nixon's stress on his personal stewardship of big-power diplomacy while minimizing Kissinger's role and influence.

The former President said, for example, that he had decided "on the spot," without consulting Kissinger, to order the U.S. invasion of Cambodia in 1970.

By Nixon's account, he accepted the advice of Connally, then the secretary of the treasury, rather than that of Kissinger in deciding to travel to the Soviet Union in May, 1972. Kissinger had proposed that the summit meetings be canceled to protest a new Communist military offensive in South Vietnam.

The former President also spoke of persuading a timorous Kissinger to "send everything that flies," not a mere token force, in a military airlift of supplies to Israel during the 1973 Yom Kippur war with Egypt and Syria.

In describing his selection of a successor to his first secretary of state, William Rogers, Nixon said

he had little choice but to give Kissinger control of both the State Department and the national security staff at the White House.

"I'd gone through the Rogers-Kissinger feud for four years," he said, "and I didn't want to buy another feud with another secretary of state" such as Connally, who Kissinger might feel "threatened his position of being the President's major foreign policy adviser."

C. Robert Zelnick, senior editor of the interview programs, said yesterday afternoon that it should be noted, in fairness to Nixon, that among the interview material not used in the program was a statement by the former President that his disagreements with Kissinger were "always on tactics and never on strategy."

Kissinger remained in the cabinet through former President Ford's abbreviated term.

The former President, who seemed nervous and defensive last week, talking of Watergate in the first program of the series, was evidently relaxed, expansive and in firm control of a familiar topic in the scenes presented last night. His eyes glinted with amusement, his hands hammered and waved and once they formed an imaginary globe of the world as he spoke of positive events and experiences of his White House days.

At one point, he summarized detente with the Soviet Union by saying, "We have to learn to live together or we die together."

Some of Nixon's remarks served to elaborate on the pragmatism with which he approached big-power diplomacy and, as the telecast last night made clear, how much it still fascinates him.

He made the following points:

- Nixon said he had rejected an Egyptian plea for a joint Soviet-U.S. military force to impose a cease-fire on the Middle East in 1973 because it would have been "sheer madness" to invite potential confrontation between superpowers in so strategic an area.

- Describing the Yom Kippur war as an object lesson in the value of detente, Nixon recalled that Soviet party leader Leonid Brezhnev had "hammered me" at a mid-1973 summit meeting about the necessity of an Israeli withdrawal from occupied Arab lands, and the President had stipulated that the United States "will not let Israel go down the tube."

As a consequence, Nixon said, the nuclear alert he ordered during the war, in response to an "ominous" note from Brezhnev that threatened unilateral intervention

in the Middle East, was "a message which would get through" to Moscow.

Neither Nixon nor Frost noted that the alert came shortly after the so-called Saturday night massacre of the Watergate period and that contemporary reports suggested that Nixon approved, rather than initiated, the alert.

- Acknowledging that the United States had forced Israel to forgo an opportunity to destroy the Egyptian Third Army, Nixon compared his method to that of the film version of a Mafia "godfather," saying of the Israelis, "We gave 'em an offer that they could not refuse."

He contended that the imposed military restraint had been in Israel's self-interest — a view not shared in Tel Aviv — because such a "Pyrrhic victory" would have led to the emergence of radical Egyptian leadership wedded to Moscow and bent on a "war of revenge such as you've never seen."

- The former President conceded that he had remained silent in public about the "cruelty" with which Pakistan sought to put down a rebellion in Bangladesh in 1971, drawing India into the war that liberated the territory. Nixon confirmed that he did so out of concern that India would have "gobbled" up Pakistan and disrupted Nixon's then-secret overtures, through Pakistan, to China.

"We saved West Pakistan because it was right," he said. "We also saved it, it's true, because it had something to do with our China initiative. The Chinese were putting a lot of pressure on us to do something."

- In a rare allusion by Nixon to current events, he implicitly criticized President Carter's public campaign for human rights in, among other nations, the Soviet Union.

He said that it would have served "no particular purpose" to have condemned West Pakistan publicly in 1971 and then compared the situation with restrictions on emigration by Soviet Jews.

"Let me tell you," the former President said, "if I had gone out in my first year in office in 1969 — or in 1970 or in 1971 and 1972 — and made a big grandstand play, speaking to the B'nai B'rith or something like that to the effect that the Soviet Union is horrible for what they're doing to the Jews, the Kremlin doors would have come down and none of 'em would have gotten out."

Asked at one point to assess Brezhnev, Nixon volunteered an extended comparison with the late Nikita Khrushchev.

"Khrushchev was boorish, crude, brilliant, ruthless, potentially rash (with a) terrible inferiority complex," Nixon said.

He recalled an evidently innocent remark by President Eisenhower to Khrushchev about the difficulty of escaping the telephone

when a President tries to vacation and said:

"Khrushchev blew up, angry. He says, 'We've got telephones in the Soviet Union too. We've got more telephones than you have.'"

The former President, viewing film clips of his meeting in Peking last year with Chairman Mao and recalling their landmark encounter four years earlier, told Frost of the "incomparable humor" of the Chinese leaders.

Hua Kuo-feng, Mao's successor, told him last year, Nixon said, of the following exchange a decade earlier between Mao and Kosygin:

"Chairman Mao told Kosygin, he said, 'Our differences are going to continue for 10,000 years.' And Kosygin said, 'Well, Mr. Chairman, after these long discussions we've had and the reassurances I've given you, don't you think you could reduce that number somewhat?'"

"And Mao, with that devilish sense of humor he has, said, 'Well, in view of the very persuasive arguments that the Premier has made, I'll knock off a thousand years. Our disputes will continue for 9000 years.'"

By last summer, Nixon said, Mao had become old and feeble, save for his "fine, delicate hands." The former President said Mao had asked, "How long will peace last? One generation?"

The chairman had held up a single finger, and Nixon had said peace might last longer. Mao added a second upraised finger and, when Nixon said, "No, I think longer," Mao had smiled, as Nixon described it, "rather ironically, skeptically."

Nixon, whose venture to China was a widely acknowledged triumph, was asked by Frost at the outset of the telecast if the idea had been his or Kissinger's. The former President's reply, setting something of a pattern for later references to the former secretary of state, was that "I conceived it before I ever met" Kissinger.

His deprecatory comments about Kissinger followed a familiar pattern, praising in one breath and discounting in another. Kissinger "executed his role brilliantly," he said, calling the former associate a "genius" of diplomacy in one exchange with the interviewer.

Half a dozen times, Nixon said, Kissinger had come to him to suggest that perhaps he (Kissinger) ought to resign. The former President said the overtures never were serious and were more likely reflections of a tendency by Kissinger "to get highly elated by some piece of good news and very depressed by something that he considered to be bad news."

Nixon added quickly that he did not mean Kissinger was "emotionally unstable."

According to Nixon, Kissinger believed on the basis of his background, experience and range of contact with heads of government abroad "that he had to be the major foreign policy adviser and he, therefore, couldn't tolerate a secretary of state who would impinge upon that position."

Near the end of last night's telecast, Frost asked Nixon what he had thought when he learned, after resigning the presidency, that Kissinger was wont to make occasional disparaging remarks about him.

For instance, at a private diplomatic dinner in Ottawa in October, 1975, at which a microphone near Kissinger was inadvertently left on, reporters overheard him describe Nixon as "unpleasant," "artificial" and "a very odd man."

Nixon said that such conduct "drives my family right up the wall" but that when he invariably got a telephone call of explanation from Kissinger, he would dismiss the remarks as unimportant.

Unlike most intellectuals, Nixon said, Kissinger "was fascinated first, by the celebrity set and, second, he liked being one himself."

The explanation for Kissinger's Ottawa remarks having been put in context, Nixon enjoyed a joke at his own expense.

"The only problem," he said, was that Kissinger in Ottawa didn't think to turn the microphone off. But, on the other hand, I didn't turn it off either in the Oval Office on occasions."