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# Confirming McFarlane

By James Reston

WASHINGTON, Oct. 18 — When President Reagan introduced Robert McFarlane as his third Assistant for National Security Affairs in the White House, he spoke about the importance of "experience" and "the need for a strong America, and an effective bipartisan foreign policy."

It was an interesting statement. His first appointment to the National Security Council, Richard Allen, was a man of long experience and strong honest anti-Communist convictions. His second, Judge William Clark, was a man of little experience but strong loyalty to the President.

Neither was primarily concerned about the "need for an effective bipartisan foreign policy," and both failed for different reasons.

President Reagan almost wept at their departure, as he did when Secretary of the Interior James Watt finally had the good judgment to quit while he was behind. Mr. Reagan gave them the usual letter of sad farewell, but he didn't bar the door.

He was probably right. To get support for his foreign policy, he needed bipartisan support. What he didn't need, or so it seems, was a national security adviser like Jeane Kirkpatrick, the chief delegate to the United Nations, who is a symbol of the anti-Communist right wing of the Republican Party.

What is clear about all this is that Mr. Reagan is taking a different tack as the 1984 election approaches. He is moving away from the extreme right toward the center, where elections are usually won.

Even under provocation from the Soviet Union, he is cooling his anti-Communist rhetoric, agreeing with the allies to try at the Geneva talks to find a compromise on the control of intermediate-range nuclear missiles, and appointing moderates like Mr. McFarlane — thus risking the hostility of the right-wing Republicans who helped put him in office.

The President chose the easy way, and he may very well have been right to choose Mr. McFarlane. But he may have been wrong. Mrs. Kirkpatrick has ideas, and sometimes won't even take "yes" for an answer, but she is the most impressive woman to appear around here in a long time, and even if you disagree with her, you have to be careful.

Meanwhile, there's always another question. If the President, as he says, really wants "an effective bipartisan foreign policy," shouldn't he submit his nomination of Mr. McFarlane to the Senate for confirmation?

This is an old chestnut around here. Henry Kissinger, who has held the job and also been Secretary of State, says "No!" On balance, he thinks the national security adviser should be the President's man, not subject to confirmation by the Senate and not subject to call by the Congress to explain what advice he's giving the President.

On the other hand (in a world of one-handed people things might be easier), Zbigniew Brzezinski, who succeeded Mr. Kissinger in the post, thinks that "consideration should again be given to making the nomination of the Assistant for National Security Affairs subject to senatorial confirmation." In his book, "Power and Principle," he explains why:

"As the United States moves into the 21st century, with its global involvement, so intense and so central to our national survival, the nerve center for national security is bound to be increasingly the White House."

The separate departments and agencies of the Federal Government, he argues, all are involved in foreign policy — Defense, Commerce, Agriculture, the C.I.A. — and no one will submit to the authority of the other but only to the White House.

Therefore, as the world has changed, he insists, the government structure in Washington must adapt to deal with the realities. And these, he concludes, cannot be handled except in the White House.

Nevertheless, he concedes that if the White House is to be the engine of foreign policy, and the national security adviser the primary source of facts and advice to the President, then the adviser, when he is appointed by the President, should be subject to confirmation by the Senate and not hide behind executive privilege but be required to answer the questions of the House and Senate when called.

It should be possible, with a little common sense, to avoid a conflict between the White House and Congress about Mr. McFarlane and his new job. He's probably better qualified to fill it than many of his predecessors, and would welcome any questions the Senate could throw at him. It's not a big deal. The men appointed as national security advisers have been as good an outfit as any advisers in any other country in the world.

The main question is whether they will have the experience to win the trust of Congress and the country. This was Judge Clark's problem. But Mr. McFarlane, while not widely known, has been around longer than almost anybody else in this Administration, and if given a chance will undoubtedly make his way.