

HUMAN EVENTS

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White House Shakeup Undermines U.S. Defense

The big shakeup at the White House, undoubtedly pushed as a shrewd political move for 1976 by Administration strategists, has backfired. The fallout so far: Republican conservatives, a major object of the move, generally have not been appeased by the Rockefeller dropout, which, oddly enough, has almost seemed a minor tremor in last week's series of quakes and upheavals; the country seems confused by chaotic conditions caused by Ford's game of musical chairs; and the President's image as "candid"—one of his most engaging qualities so far as the public is concerned—has been badly tarnished.

Far more important to the nation, however, is the view of national security officials both here and abroad that the sacking of James Schlesinger, perhaps the most respected defense secretary since James Forrestal, is a grievous blow to the U.S. military establishment and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization.

Ford's decision to replace a man of Schlesinger's stature with Donald Rumsfeld, a political animal held in small regard by both military and civilian officials who observed Rumsfeld in action as ambassador to NATO, has only fueled the concern of those who fear that Secretary of State Henry Kissinger can now pursue his detente policies unchecked.

Ford's other major alterations in the national security field have also failed to meet with universal acclaim. Many members of the security community, in fact, are incensed that the President picked America's envoy to Peking, George Bush, whose background in intelligence work is practically nil, to replace William Colby, an experienced intelligence official, as director of the supersensitive Central Intelligence Agency. While the President may have found it necessary to offer up Colby as a sacrificial lamb to Sen. Frank Church (D.-Idaho), Bush is considered ill-equipped to step into the top CIA slot.

Those who have feared Secretary of State Henry Kissinger's accumulation of power within the Ford Administration, moreover, have hardly been impressed by Kissinger's relinquishing control as director of the National Security Council. The obvious reason: that post will be taken over by Kissinger's own deputy, Lt. Gen. Brent Scowcroft, frequently referred to as the secretary of state's "alter ego."

From the outset, the White House's grand plan seemed fated to boomerang. Its overall merits aside, the entire maneuver was poorly executed, a point now conceded by the President's own aides.

As insiders tell it, the two most politically sensitive issues concerned Rockefeller and Schlesinger. The White House intended to have the Rockefeller letter telling of his decision not to run in 1976 reach the press on Monday, November 3. The conservative wing of the GOP, supposedly, would be so deliriously happy it would hardly blink at the announcement of the Schlesinger dismissal, which was to come two days later. But the timing of the events could not be controlled.

When *Newsweek* discovered on Saturday, November 1, that Schlesinger was to be dismissed, something Schlesinger himself did not even suspect, the President—who had shared his decision to dump Schlesinger a week earlier with Rumsfeld, Kissinger, Scowcroft and Rumsfeld's aide, Dick Cheney—felt he had to fire his defense secretary before the magazine story broke. Hence he fired him, along with CIA director William Colby, on Sunday morning. As a result, the Schlesinger story became the central focus of the nation's attention, with Rocky's astonishing decision not to seek the vice presidential nomination impacting rather softly on the country and the GOP conservatives.

While the GOP right was supposed to be rejoicing in Rocky's demise, and thus presumably less attracted to Ronald Reagan, they were, instead, found brood-

defense secretary whom they have long since come to admire. While the series of firings and changes was supposed to make the President appear like a man in firm control of the White House, a great many people, perhaps a majority, saw only confusion reigning at 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue.

The Ford press conference on Monday night did not smooth things over for the Administration, and in some people's opinion, made matters worse. The President, to coin a phrase, "stonewalled" the media.

Repeatedly asked what caused the massive shakeup in the national security area, the President repeatedly insisted that it stemmed only from his desire to bring in his "own team." He firmly and frequently stated or implied that neither policy nor personal differences were involved in his actions.

But the "own team" explanation did not wash down easily, since none of the persons Ford has now selected to run his defense and foreign policy show are Ford people. Each is a Nixon retread. Rumsfeld was brought into the federal bureaucracy by President Nixon as Office of Economic Opportunity director, head of the Cost of Living Council and ambassador to NATO. Bush served Nixon as ambassador to the United Nations, head of the Republican National Committee and envoy to Peking. Scowcroft is also a Nixon-Kissinger man, having been named military assistant to President Nixon in February 1972 and Kissinger's deputy on the National Security Council in early 1973.

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