

THE WORLD

American Survey



The new unelect: Bush Rumsfeld and Richardson

Rumsfeld wins the prize in Ford's untidy reshuffle

Washington, DC

Differences on substantial matters of policy there are within the Ford Administration, a-plenty, and some of them played a part in precipitating what is being called "the Sunday afternoon massacre" last weekend. What might seem to be the obvious inference—that President Ford in deciding whom to dismiss, whom to keep and whom to move was guided by the wish to resolve those substantial differences—should, however, be avoided. The indications are otherwise; they suggest that Mr Ford's guiding beacon was the pure, unsullied light of partisan political manoeuvre.

Even by that light, the questions that beset Mr Ford last week were not of a piece or all equally simple; his traffic signs did not all point the same way. Assume, for instance, as is almost certainly true, that Mr Nelson Rockefeller's decision to take himself out of contention for the Republican vice-presidential nomination next year was not spontaneous on his part, but was extracted from him by the President, then this can fairly be construed as a move by Mr Ford to head off the rival presidential candidacy of Mr Ronald Reagan, a challenge he is inordinately nervous about. The same end is not at

all served, at least not in any direct way, by getting rid of the secretary of defence, Mr James Schlesinger, who was standing out for a big defence budget and a cautious approach to the strategic arms limitation talks, while retaining as secretary of state Mr Henry Kissinger, who stands for detente, for conciliation of the Soviet negotiators and for an early Salt 2 agreement while Mr Brezhnev is still there to sign it.

As between Mr Schlesinger and Mr Kissinger, Mr Ford appears to have been guided by the principle of being visibly "presidential", that is, decisive and commanding. The two men had been fighting too much and the open, brutal skirmishing between their officials was making the whole Administration, on its foreign-policy side, look excessively shaggy. One recent public dispute was about Mr Kissinger's promise, in concluding the Sinai agreement, of favourable consideration to a supply of Pershing missiles to Israel. Another concerned the attempt of Mr Schlesinger and the defence department to insist on an allowance being made in the Salt agreement for the cruise missile that is under development. In both cases the defence department, aggrieved or frustrated by Mr Kissinger's possession of

the high ground in the White House afforded him by his second position as assistant to the President for national security affairs, felt it had no choice but to argue its case more or less in public; thus feelings were exacerbated and the proprieties strained.

No sign exists of Mr Ford having concerned himself with the substance of either of these two important arguments, any more than Richard II of England bothered his head about the charges flung at each other by Henry Bolingbroke and Thomas Mowbray. King Richard saw an opportunity and seized it to banish them both, one on rather harsher terms than the other; a neat, convenient solution, although to be sure it went wrong in that case, and ended in the king's ruin.

President Ford dealt with the Schlesinger-Kissinger matter by abruptly dismissing Mr Schlesinger, while relieving Mr Kissinger of his valuable position as head of the national security apparatus in the White House—banishing him, in effect, to the state department. To see this outcome, as some have, as a single-handed defeat of Mr Schlesinger by Mr Kissinger is natural, given Mr Kissinger's stupendous prestige, but it misconceives what happened last weekend. Another hand was at work, and while Mr Schlesinger was defeated all right, the victory belongs not to Mr Kissinger, but elsewhere.

Because the dismissal of Mr Schlesinger leaked out on Sunday, while Mr Rockefeller's decision not to be a candidate for the vice presidency next

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year did not become known until Monday, it seemed for a moment that the Schlesinger event preceded the Rockefeller event. Not so: Vice President Rockefeller resigned himself to his fate last week and promised, last week, to deliver his letter of self-effacement to Mr Ford on Monday, November 3rd. Mr Ford's campaign managers and advisers, such as they are, have long made no secret of their view that the prospect of his having Mr Rockefeller as his vice-presidential candidate would hamper Mr Ford in his pursuit of the Republican nomination and would help Mr Ronald Reagan, against Mr Ford, in some critical primary election campaigns.

Against that, Mr Rockefeller's friends were able to argue that when it came to the general election Mr Rockefeller would be a decided help to his chief, particularly in New York but also in some other populous states with big cities. Mr Ford's decision to wash his hands of New York's fiscal difficulties, to condemn the place and in effect to campaign against it, invalidated this argument. It also put the vice president in the painful and humiliating position of having to listen to his chief dismissing as trivial a probable event, the bankruptcy of New York, which Mr Rockefeller, a loyal New Yorker, himself called a "catastrophe". A potentate humiliated is a potentate enfeebled, and so the pack closed in on Mr Rockefeller. Luckily, thanks to his worldly position, he will not lack for stimulating pursuits after January, 1977.

His withdrawal, which became known to the inner circle in the White House

last week, suddenly opened up the vice presidential nomination as an opportunity for other Republicans anxious to make their way in national politics. One such Republican was President Ford's chief of staff, Mr Donald Rumsfeld, the able former Congressman from Illinois who held several high posts in the Nixon Administration but stayed well clear of the Watergate taint. There are others: Mr George Bush, another former Congressman (from Texas) at the head of the American mission in Peking, and Mr Elliot Richardson, the ambassador in London. Both return to posts in Washington, perhaps to await a call, too.

Mr Rumsfeld's problem was somewhat different from theirs, since he was on hand in Washington already; but, for him, seeking the vice presidency while actually running the president's offices would not have been seemly or practicable. As an article on page 63 of *The Economist* of October 4th explained, Mr Rumsfeld faced a slightly complex problem of how to get back into elective politics in his own state, Illinois, for some years to come. To run for the vice presidency as Mr Ford's partner would be the ideal solution to his difficulty. True, if Mr Ford loses Mr Rumsfeld will lose too, but by then he will be nationally known and well placed to try for the presidency later. First, however, he needs a base outside the White House, a place where he can occupy himself conspicuously in the public service while waiting for the call. What better place than the department of defence? And thus it turns out: Mr James Schlesinger is removed from the defence department, and Mr Rumsfeld takes his place.

Ford makes his move

Some delicacy is required in piecing together this chapter of last weekend's political events. President Ford in his press conference on Monday made plain his belief that he had personally decided each move in the reshuffle without help from anybody, and specifically without any help from Mr Donald Rumsfeld. "I did it totally on my own", said Mr Ford; "I fitted the pieces together; and they fitted excellently . . . these are my guys that I wanted". That is what he said, and he may believe it.

What Mr Ford intended, jotting names on his pad in solitude as he would have the public suppose he did, was that the vice president would hand him his letter of withdrawal on Monday morning, to be made public that day as it, in fact, was, and that he would then call a press conference at mid-week at which he would announce Mr Schlesinger's replacement by Mr Rumsfeld; Mr Kissinger's withdrawal

from the White House staff and retention of the state department; the replacement of Mr William Colby at the Central Intelligence Agency by Mr George Bush; the retirement of Mr Rogers Morton; and the nomination of Mr Elliot Richardson to be his successor as secretary of commerce.

Mr Schlesinger, the president intended to announce at the same time, was either going to take the place of Mr William Casey (who resigned some weeks ago) at the Export-Import Bank, or that of Mr Richardson at the embassy in London, while Mr Colby was going to be ambassador to Nato. A neat reshuffle of persons and rearrangement of responsibilities would thus have been demonstrated to the public, with the president crisply in charge.

One or two things went wrong. Mr Schlesinger and Mr Colby both refused the proffered new positions. The news of Mr Schlesinger's dismissal was not kept secret till Wednesday, it was leaked to Newsweek magazine within an hour or two of Mr Schlesinger learning of it, and the television networks quickly heard about it. Mr Schlesinger did not leak it and it looks unlikely that any of his staff did; the only other likely source would have been somebody in the White House who did not approve of what was happening.

While this was coming out Mr Ford and his press secretary were in Florida looking after President Sadat of Egypt and professing to know nothing of the matter. The news, in short, got out untidily and in a sequence other than what was planned.

Nothing had happened to make it necessary that the differences between Mr Schlesinger and Mr Kissinger, or between the defence department and the department of state, be resolved last weekend particularly. The dispute about the place of the American cruise missile in the prospective Salt agreement (see page 16) was indeed acrimonious, but it had been papered over to some extent and was no longer pressing. What had really happened to Mr Schlesinger was that he became more vulnerable, partly because of his ill-advised attack on the Appropriations committee of the House of Representatives on October 20th. Mr Schlesinger was defending the defence budget against congressional cuts. He was also defending it against the president's budget office and this obliged him to argue about the level of defence expenditure with President Ford, with whom he had a long talk on November 1st. Nothing was said at that meeting about the president wanting Mr Schlesinger's resignation; they talked about the defence budget, that was all.

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The chopper did not fall till next morning.

If there is one thing President Ford can claim to know about, it is Congress, and various reports have Mr Ford irritated, on this and other occasions, by what he believed to be Mr Schlesinger's amateurish assessments of what Congress would and would not do for defence. Thus a version gained currency, and has been assiduously circulated from the White House, to the effect that Mr Schlesinger was inept in his dealings with

Congress. While it is true that the dismissed secretary of defence, a learned man with a powerful mind and a rock-like adherence to conclusions once arrived at, had been known to talk to other grown men like a schoolmaster to the fifth form, there is not much truth in the general idea that he cannot get on with Congress. By and large the congressional committees he has had to deal with, though they may not like being talked down to, respect his

seriousness, his intelligence and his honesty. Still, just for the moment, with his flanks exposed towards the state department, the president's office and Congress, vulnerable he was and out he went.

That opened up the defence department as an available perch for the quick-thinking, able, ambitious Mr Rumsfeld, but it would not much appeal to Mr Rumsfeld to have to defend his new department's point of view, and to have to maintain his own communications with President Ford, with Mr Henry Kissinger sitting in charge of the White House office (that of the national security staff) through which Mr Rumsfeld's communications to the president would routinely have to make their way. Not, it must be supposed, by coincidence, the long-discussed question of the advisability of having the White House foreign policy office run by the secretary of state, or by a separate person concerned only with serving the president, was suddenly resolved. General Brent Scowcroft, Mr Kissinger's deputy, takes charge of the national security council.

It is true, and is being emphasised, that General Scowcroft (an American military staff officer of the best type, which is very good indeed) was Mr Kissinger's man and can be counted on to be loyal to him. That is not the point. Once in full charge of the national security council staff, as he now is, General Scowcroft will be the president's man, and he will be bound to make sure that the views of Mr Rumsfeld's department get presented to Mr Ford on an equality with those of Mr Kissinger's department.

That should be good enough for Mr Rumsfeld. He, for his part, leaves his own conscientious young deputy, Mr Richard Cheney, to run the White House staff in his place. Mr Cheney, too, will serve the president first and foremost, as is right, but the arrangement is likely to prove perfectly satisfactory from the point of view of Mr Rumsfeld, whose course in national politics is now decidedly upward.

The CIA draws a politician

Washington, DC

Few people doubted that Mr William Colby's days as director of Central Intelligence were numbered. He was no friend of Mr Henry Kissinger, the national security-foreign policy strong man. As a career professional in the CIA, he had no independent base of support—not even a congressional cheering squad along the lines of the one that rallied around Mr Schlesinger, the departing defence secretary.

Mr Colby was widely considered to have thrown his predecessor, Mr Richard Helms, to the wolves, suggesting that the justice department might look into the question of whether Mr Helms had committed perjury in testifying about the CIA's role in Chile. Morale in the intelligence agency in a period of congressional investigation and intense public scrutiny is wobbly, at best, and there have been repeated indications, in public statements and not so carefully concealed leaks, that the Ford Administration planned a major reorganisation of the CIA.

But the timing of Mr Colby's departure and the identity of his successor, Mr George Bush, come as major surprises. The inquiries by the House of Representatives and Senate into the CIA and other parts of the intelligence community are far from complete, and it is possible that the chairmen of the respective investigating committees, Mr Otis Pike and Mr Frank Church, will take the firing of Mr Colby, who was co-operative with them, as a provocation to probe more aggressively.

If Mr Colby's dismissal is, as widely reported, meant to punish him for his candour with the investigators, it probably comes too late to reverse the tide (and could even stimulate further leaks from inside). If, on the other hand, it is meant to signal a new image for the cloak-and-dagger agency, it probably comes too soon. In any event, the CIA will no longer have a recognised, knowledgeable spokesman. And there is a risk that any legislation that emerges from the congressional investigations will appear to be imposed upon the agency without its own suggestions being considered.

Mr Bush's arrival at CIA head-

quarters in Langley, Virginia, could cause morale there to plunge even further. Although he has served as ambassador to the United Nations and recently as the American representative in Peking, Mr Bush is a politician, a man who has more than once demonstrated his desire to help rescue the Republican party in time of trial (for example, by taking over the Republican National Committee after Mr Richard Nixon's re-election in 1972, as the Watergate cover-up was unravelling).

For all his charm and gracefulness, he is anything but a professional in his new field. His appointment conjures up memories of the stewardship of Mr L. Patrick Gray at the FBI in 1972 and 1973—a well-intentioned man whose sense of loyalty outweighed his qualifications and led him to destroy some Watergate-related evidence. The best interpretation that can be put on Mr Bush's nomination is that he would be temporary—on the scene just long enough to help Mr Ford find a longer-range CIA director to reorganise the agency—but even that view is not very reassuring to the beleaguered CIA.

Although Mr Bush cannot really take charge until he returns from China and is confirmed by the Senate, there is no sign that the committees on Capitol Hill will wait for him before proceeding. The Senate committee, rejecting pleas for caution from the White House, declared that it would release later in November its still-secret report on CIA involvement in assassination plots against foreign leaders, and it scheduled four days of open hearings into the "covert action" side of agency affairs. On Wednesday Mr Ford asked Mr Colby to stay on for some weeks to help Congress with these inquiries. When he learned of his dismissal from the president, Mr Colby started preparing to clear out his desk very promptly, but at the president's urging he agreed to carry on until the job is one Mr Bush can take over.

One unanswered question is whether Mr Colby, out of anger or resentment, might now feel moved to become even more co-operative with the congressional investigators, in public or in private.