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# TIME

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## THE ADMINISTRATION: FORD'S COSTLY PURGE

A concerned Gerald Ford met with some of his closest old friends and domestic advisers three weeks ago for a bare-knuckle assessment of what had gone wrong with his presidency. During the year of transition from the trauma of the Nixon Administration, his open and candid manner had calmed and reassured the nation. But then his fortunes had changed. His popularity fell to a low 47% in the Gallup poll late in October. His tireless campaigning for election drew yawns from even the party faithful. Ronald Reagan was challenging him on the right and moving up in the polls. More and more Americans were complaining that Ford's presidency lacked purpose and direction. Thus, at the private strategy session, recalled one adviser, "the President was urged to make everybody understand that he was definitely calling the shots."

Last week Ford tried to seize control of the situation with a barrage of firings and hirings such as the nation had not seen before, with the exception—in very different circumstances—of the Saturday Night Massacre by the desperate Nixon Administration in 1973 (see following story). For Ford, the moves backfired—at least initially. To many Americans, his actions seemed abrupt, not to say panicky. Instead of strength and certainty, he conveyed the impression that he was bumbling and dominated by political motives.

Ford insisted that he only wanted to field "my own team" in the crucial area of national security; he invoked the word team 16 times during a 33-minute televised press conference, four times in a single sentence. He exulted, "I did it totally on my own. It was my decision. I fitted the pieces together, and they fitted excellently ... These are my guys." Despite the Mr. Touchdown talk, the explanation did not score: the men who were benched had all served Ford ably. If his shuffling had been done only to put in more congenial and compliant subordinates, then it was even more unattractive and potentially dangerous.

Most of the criticism focused on the summary dismissal of Secretary of Defense James Schlesinger, an

iconoclastic intellectual who says what he thinks —often in a prickly way. Was the reason for the firing his strong dissent from Secretary of State Henry Kissinger's brand of détente? Or was it that Ford considered him overly acerbic, abrasive, aggressive? The answer, it seemed, was a combination of both, with the personal motive outweighing the policy problem. A President is certainly entitled to fire advisers with whom he cannot work. But a self-assured President should also be tolerant of dissent for the sake of keeping himself open to different points of view.

Ford's reasons for firing CIA Director William Colby were clearer. A fresh figure, preferably someone from outside the intelligence community, was needed to restore public confidence in the agency. Moreover, in the Administration's view, Colby had been too forthcoming in releasing secret information about the CIA's past misdeeds to the congressional investigating committees. But Ford's timing in dismissing Colby was odd indeed. Many political leaders wondered why the President had not waited until the investigations were over.

At the same time, many liberal and moderate Republicans were disturbed by Nelson Rockefeller's announcement that he was withdrawing from consideration as Ford's Vice President in 1976. Despite Ford's denials, the consensus in Washington was that the President had got the word to Rocky to jump before he was pushed. Ford's purpose: to keep conservative Republicans from deserting to Reagan.

In general, Congressmen of both parties felt that Ford had blundered, not only because of some bad timing and a lack of usual courtesies, but, more important, because of the questionable caliber of a couple of the replacements. As successors to Schlesinger and Colby, Ford chose two ambitious and heatedly partisan Republicans: for Secretary of Defense, Donald Rumsfeld, the White House chief of staff; for CIA director, George Bush, the chief of the U.S. liaison office in Peking. Senator Henry Jackson, a candidate for the Democratic presidential nomination, charged that Ford was surrounding himself with "yes men and lackeys." The switches further increased the record number of high-level Administration changes since 1969, a churning of Government that not only reflects bad management but also has upset planning and subverted morale in many departments.

Ford's credibility with the American public suffered. For the first time, the earnest, honest man from Grand Rapids looked straight into the television cameras and obviously dissembled. He insisted that "there were no basic differences" on détente between Schlesinger and Secretary of State Henry Kissinger. An incredulous reporter, John Osborne of the New Republic, asked a carefully worded follow-up question: "Are you saying and intending to be understood to say that neither personal nor policy differences between Dr. Kissinger and Mr. Schlesinger contributed to this change?" Responded Ford: "That is correct." But on Sunday, Ford shifted considerably, admitting on Meet the Press that "a growing tension" among top Administration officials led him to fire Schlesinger. He added: "I was uncomfortable in the situation."

How will all this affect the '76 campaign? On one hand the Republican right will be placated—at least tentatively and temporarily—by Rockefeller's withdrawal. With Rocky gone, said Republican Governor James E. Holshouser Jr. of North Carolina, "it will now be more difficult to mount a conservative challenge." Added a Ford campaign aide: "We pulled the rug out from under the Republicans who have been holding out. Now we can say, 'If you want to have an influence on the ticket, you'd better get in line.' "

Candidate Ford can dangle prospects of a vice-presidential nomination to induce various Republicans to back him. Mused California Pollster Mervin Field: "Ford has a wide-open dance card because he's not coming to the prom with a girl of his own." Among the contenders are three members of the Administration's new "team": Rumsfeld, Bush and Elliot Richardson (see page 30), who was named to succeed Rogers Morton as Secretary of Commerce. Morton is expected to take over leadership of the President's campaign from Director Howard ("Bo") Callaway, who has been blamed by many Republicans for its ineptitude.

For all that, and some praise among Republicans for Ford's "decisiveness," the prevailing opinion within the party was that Ford had hurt his chances, although the President himself predicted after the changes that he would be a winner "right up to the end of 1976." Quite a few Republicans, especially conservatives, were unsettled by the sacking of Schlesinger. Others were upset by the way Ford handled the whole shuffle. Said former California Republican Chairman Gordon Luce: "People are asking, 'What is going on in Washington? Why the musical chairs? Who's in charge?' Such a massive change has to raise the question of whether the Administration is in disarray."

Given this disarray, many Republicans would not be surprised to see a challenge to Ford from the party's moderates, possibly even from Rockefeller, who did not rule out the race (see page 19). Until Ford's recent slippage in the polls and last week's events, such a challenge from the moderates would have been inconceivable.

Beyond Ford's political future what will the effects of the shake-up be in foreign and defense policy?

The President promised that Kissinger would continue to have the "dominant role in the formulation of and the carrying out of foreign policy." Nonetheless, the changes will diminish Kissinger's powers. Ford stripped Kissinger of his second job, Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs. In that post, Kissinger chaired the 40 Committee, which oversees the CIA, and had control over all of the foreign policy recommendations sent to the President. Though the job went to a loyal Kissinger aide, Lieut. General Brent Scowcroft, the shift ended Kissinger's monopoly as the President's foreign policy adviser. One White House aide disclosed that Kissinger's daily one-hour private meetings with Ford on foreign policy may be cut

down, perhaps even to one session a week. Rumsfeld, unlike Schlesinger, may also meet weekly with Ford—in private or jointly with Kissinger—to provide the President with what White House sources called "broader foreign policy input on a regular basis."

Kissinger and Rumsfeld have had an antagonistic relationship that dates back to the early days of the Ford Administration and has sometimes been displayed in public. One day in September 1974, Kissinger emerged from the Oval Office and facetiously asked Rumsfeld, then U.S. Ambassador to NATO, "Would you like to kiss my ring?" Two months later, both were in Peking with Ford. As they headed for the limousines one morning, Kissinger asked Rumsfeld, "Would you like to go sightseeing with Nancy or come to the talks with me?" Rumsfeld winced noticeably and replied, "I'll come with you."

Kissinger last week maintained his sense of humor. While briefing congressional Republican leaders on foreign aid, he cracked, "I've been so busy figuring out what jobs I have left that I haven't had time to study this." Showing a visitor a dagger, a gift from the government of Abu Dhabi, Kissinger said with mocking menace, "You see what happens when you turn your back?" Informed by White House Barber Milton Pitts that Jerry Ford was next on his schedule, Kissinger responded, "Tell the President that the only place I'll get to see him now is in the barbershop."

Turning serious, Kissinger argued that the new structure would not reduce his influence. Said he: "In my seventh year in Washington, if I cannot get a fair hearing for my views, then I do not deserve to be in my job." Moreover, it is questionable whether Rumsfeld has the intellectual capacity to compete with Kissinger in debate. But "Rummy" enjoys Ford's full confidence and is much closer to him personally than Kissinger is. Thus, Rumsfeld may well be a powerful and effective rival, particularly if Ford allows election-year politics—on which Rumsfeld is most expert—to influence foreign policy.

Kissinger believes that it would have been easier to forge a SALT II pact with the Soviets if Schlesinger had remained Secretary of Defense. Though the two men differed fundamentally about détente (see page 20), Kissinger respected Schlesinger's intellect and feels they would have reached a compromise. In contrast, Kissinger has no great regard for Rumsfeld. The Soviets have rejected the latest U.S. position on SALT, and Kissinger fears he must wait until Rumsfeld is confirmed, probably early next year, before finishing work on a new negotiating proposal. Beyond that, the Administration may feel the need to take a tougher position to show conservatives that the firing of Schlesinger does not signal a new American softness. Schlesinger is expected to be called before Congress to testify on the SALT talks, and his opposition may well harden feelings against détente.

Rumsfeld is believed to hold Schlesinger's view that the U.S. should demand more concessions from the Soviets. Last summer, while Ford was flying to Brussels to attend a NATO conference, Rumsfeld worked

with him to toughen his language in a speech on détente. Among the statements they composed was a call for a "realistic agenda for détente, an agenda that serves our interests and not the interests of others who do not share our values ... that anticipates and precludes the exploitation of our perceived weaknesses."

If Rumsfeld concludes that a SALT agreement will jeopardize Ford's election chances, he might recommend that it be delayed until 1977. Indeed, Ford said at his press conference that the U.S. was "under no time pressure" on SALT.

While Ford insisted that his personnel shake-up did not reflect "any weakness" on national defense, U.S. allies and adversaries were confused about what the changes would mean. Though the Soviets have often criticized Schlesinger as an ugly American, Moscow reacted cautiously to his ouster, because Rumsfeld is virtually unknown to them. In contrast, the Chinese officials feared that Schlesinger's firing could produce closer ties between the U.S. and U.S.S.R. Now they may want to assess the impact of the Cabinet shuffle before confirming that Ford's China trip will take place as scheduled in early December.

South Koreans were shaken by the loss of Schlesinger, who had been extremely popular because of his recommendation that the U.S. use "nuclear weapons if necessary" to repel any attack from the North. Schlesinger's replacement by Rumsfeld dismayed many European defense officials, who are afraid that the new man will pay more attention to the winds of American politics than the needs of facing up to the Russians. NATO officials got a good look at Rumsfeld while he was the U.S. Ambassador to the alliance, and while they became used to his crisp style, they rank him far behind Schlesinger, who they feel is a brilliant strategist. One NATO official said that his colleagues welcomed having "a tough-minded guy like Schlesinger around who acts as an alternative opinion to Kissinger."

Some Pentagon officials who have worked with Rumsfeld admire his quick mind; others find him shallow. Said a retired general who knew Rumsfeld at NATO: "You had the feeling that he was propped up reading someone else's position paper." Other generals and admirals worried that he would be running for the vice-presidential nomination from the Pentagon's E-Ring. On the other hand, many hoped that Rumsfeld's political savvy would make him more successful than Schlesinger in pressing Pentagon programs on Congress.

George Bush, Ford's choice as CIA director, is in a similar situation. In his brief, unremarkable diplomatic career, he has served for two years as U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations and spent the past 13 months as chief of the U.S. liaison office in Peking. But he has no firsthand knowledge of the CIA, its operations or the investigations that have rocked the agency for nearly a year.

In Peking, Bush told a correspondent for the Toronto Globe and Mail that he would be a strong defender of

the CIA because "I believe in the importance of a sound and strong intelligence capability." His friendship with Ford and experience with Congress, where Bush served two terms in the House, might help the agency as it tries to rebuild after the congressional investigations end.

These considerations were outweighed by apprehension among CIA officers that Bush may also try to use his new job as a steppingstone to the vice presidency. Some CIA officials called him "a pol," "a hack" or "a p.r. man." Said one officer: "It's understandable why the President couldn't pick someone from the profession itself, but did he really have to pick someone who is so much the opposite of a professional?"

Bush faces a stiff confirmation fight from Senators who believe that Ford should have chosen a nonpolitician. Among the opponents inevitably will be Idaho Democrat Frank Church, who heads the Senate's investigation of the CIA. As if to confirm that the nomination of Bush had not been considered carefully, Ford had to change his plans to force Colby out immediately. One day after he fired him, the President asked Colby to stay on until Bush is confirmed. Rather belatedly, Ford realized that Bush should remain in Peking until after the presidential visit. Colby's early departure would have left the CIA in the hands of his deputy, General Vernon Walters, during the last stages of the congressional investigations and Bush's confirmation fight. Walters would not be the CIA's best witness before a committee because he was somewhat tainted by the Watergate scandal. Acting on White House orders shortly after the breakin, Walters had urged the FBI to restrict part of its Watergate investigation for national security reasons that turned out to be nonexistent.

Ford's nominations are expected to be confirmed. But none of them excited admiration in Congress, not even among Republicans. Commented one G.O.P. House leader: "Ford said that he wanted 'my guys' in the Government, and then he picked a lot of old faces from the Nixon Administration—Richardson, Rumsfeld, Bush." Team players they may be, but they will have a hard time showing that they fit the positions to which they have been assigned.

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