

WASHINGTON

The Vance-Brzezinski Squabble

by Tad Szulc

WHEN WOODROW WILSON had Colonel Edward House and FDR had Harry Hopkins helping them to cope with, among other things, world affairs, the State Department took an alarmed view of this private arrangement. In both cases, the department feared that these influential persons were undermining the role of the secretary of state as the president's principal adviser on foreign policy.

In those days, the formal office of National Security Adviser to the President hadn't yet been invented, but in their personal and policy clashes with the State Department, House and Hopkins were clearly the forerunners of Henry Kissinger and Zbigniew Brzezinski (McGeorge Bundy and Walt Rostow were also part of this tradition).

So today's sharpening adversary relationship between Brzezinski's White House-based National Security Council machine and Cyrus Vance's State Department is therefore not a startling new development but a logical product, rather, of twentieth-century American history. The fact is that every president with strong opinions on foreign policy has insisted on having what is nowadays known as a national security adviser, and tensions between this adviser and the State Department—always jealous of its prerogatives—have thus always been inevitable.

Different presidents and national security advisers have distinctive styles however, and the Brzezinski-Vance confrontation is not simply a replay of the problem between Kissinger and William P. Rogers, who was Nixon's secretary of state till well into the first year of Nixon's second term.

Kissinger actually brutalized Rogers, openly excluding him from major policy-making decisions and finally taking over the State Department while retaining the White House post, with its instant access to the president.

Brzezinski on the other hand has handled his relations and disagreements with Vance—and the disagreements are many—in a much more subtle and sophisticated way, although the presidential adviser's influence has grown from the outset. For one thing, Brzezinski was at first less assertive, flamboyant, and authoritative in manner than Kissinger—though in time he

became all three of these things.

Ostensibly, Jimmy Carter didn't encourage the kind of abrasive operation that Kissinger ran. If only for show (but insiders say that it is for substance too), the President prefers a more formal, academic system: Thus every Friday there is a seminar-style White House breakfast, presumably held to thrash out policy, that is attended by Brzezinski, Vance, Vice-President Walter Mondale, Secretary of Defense Harold Brown, and, more recently, Hamilton Jordan, of the domestic staff. And there was another big difference: Cyrus Vance, quiet and reserved as he is, didn't throw in the towel as easily as Rogers used to.

Washington being Washington, the Brzezinski-Vance policy disputes tend to produce the impression of warfare between State and the White House. This impression is fed by commentators who are disturbed by the way in which the Carter administration is handling international affairs. The truth, as usual, is more complex.

Essentially, the issue between Brzezinski and Vance revolves around the question of the best approach to Soviet-American relations. Brzezinski, broadly speaking, favors tougher tactics while Vance prefers greater delicacy in diplomacy. This difference in outlook has been both exaggerated and misinterpreted. It is of course nonsense to portray Vance, Arms Control and Disarmament Agency director Paul Warnke, and special assistant for Soviet affairs Marshall Shulman as "soft liners." Brzezinski comes closer, however, to being a "hard liner" in the classic sense.

Nevertheless, there are differences in the two approaches that can affect not only the style but the substance of policy. A classic example was seen earlier this year in our response to Soviet-Cuban involvement in the war in the Horn of Africa. Brzezinski, who has a penchant for shooting from the hip, brashly volunteered the public comment that such Soviet activities might affect the negotiations for a new strategic arms' limitations agreement (SALT). But Vance, also publicly, shot down the linkage notion. Carter, however, picked up the Brzezinski line the next day—though less stridently.

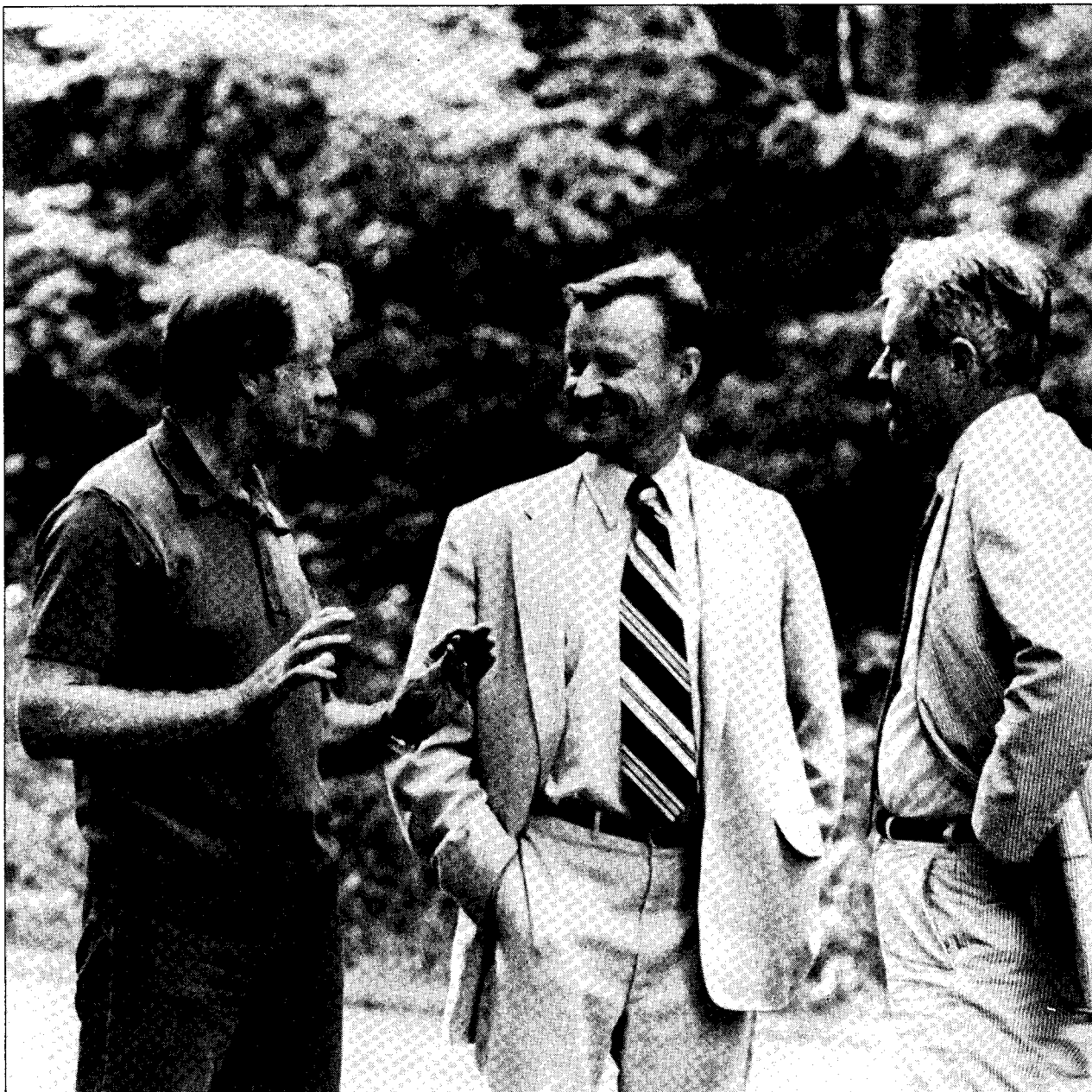
This example is important because it suggests either that Carter's *instincts*

are closer to Brzezinski's or that he prefers the *logic* of the national security adviser's approach to that of Vance's. The State Department was somewhat appalled by the Brzezinski linkage exercise, regarding it as an empty bluff because the administration was clearly not about to ditch SALT over the Horn. But White House people took the view that it was necessary, at least for effect, "to draw the line somewhere" in the face of apparent Soviet provocation. In this connection, it is worth remembering that it was Brzezinski who told his staff early in this administration that the Russians "must learn to pacify us."

Overall, the impression has developed in Washington that Brzezinski has succeeded to a large degree in centering the formulation of foreign policy in the White House, leaving the State Department with more of an emissary role. This impression is probably exaggerated, but Vance, contrary to his better initial judgment, has been spending an inordinate amount of time on international travel. This shuttling about has had the inevitable effect of diminishing the secretary's personal impact on Carter simply because there is less possibility of contact. In April and early May, for example, Vance was away on an extended trip to Africa and Moscow, following it up with a hasty visit to Mexico. Previously, he had engaged in considerable Middle Eastern journeying.

The importance to both men of constant access to the President cannot be overemphasized—Friday breakfasts or not—and the White House reality is that Brzezinski is the first official to see Carter every morning and often sees him throughout the day. And unlike Kissinger, he presents recommendations on what he regards as the best policy options. It doesn't take much imagination to conclude that Brzezinski's thoughts have a better chance of prevailing in the Oval Office than do Vance's.

This fact of course mortifies many key State Department officials to whom Brzezinski is not the most admired figure in town. They would like Vance to be more assertive, although they admire his loyalty to the White House—which includes a strict ban on bad mouthing Brzezinski and the National Security Council staff. But there has been considerable annoyance at the



Jimmy Carter, Zbigniew Brzezinski, and Cyrus Vance—"Brzezinski's thoughts have a better chance of prevailing in the Oval Office."

State Department over Brzezinski's practice of holding White House background briefings for newsmen concerning Vance's foreign missions even before the secretary has had time to return home.

Brzezinski finally completed the upstaging of Vance with his television appearance on May 28, in which he took the Russians to task for violating the "code" of détente. It was the greatest public turning point in U.S. foreign policy under Carter—and the secretary of state was conspicuously absent.

Personal relations between Brzezinski's staff and its State Depart-

ment counterparts have also deteriorated in the past year. Aside from certain basic policy differences—mainly in the area of Soviet relations, Africa, and arms transfers—many State Department officials resent what has frequently been described as the "imperious" tone of National Security Council staffers in demanding from Foggy Bottom instant responses on complex matters. The complaint is that the quality of State Department output suffers from this sense of urgency, which is not always justified by the circumstances.

As noted above, tensions between

the White House and the State Department are not a novelty. In numerous areas—such as the Middle East—the policy views of Brzezinski and Vance do coincide, even if their ideas about how to act on those views are not always the same. But the reality remains that under Jimmy Carter, the national security adviser carries considerably more clout than the secretary of state, which may not be an ideal state of affairs. •

With this issue, Tad Szulc, author of The Illusion of Peace, begins a regular Washington column.

SATURDAY REVIEW: THE ARTS

The Emptiness of Our Empty Rooms

by Owen Edwards

THE HOLY GRAIL for certain questing parapsychologists is the clear and irrefutable photographs of a ghost, a passport picture of sorts providing bona fides at the border zone between this world and the next. So far, the results have been less than satisfying, looking more like cigarette smoke than the spectral remains of, say, farmer Ezekiel Peabody, of Salt Point, New York. For those of us less concerned with proof positive of hauntings, however, a highly successful form of "ghost picture" has long existed in the resonant empty rooms and spaces of such photographers as Frederick Evans, Eugene Atget, Walker Evans, and Clarence Laughlin. The pictures by these and other photographers are palpably filled with the spirits of those who have been there before.

No one with even an atrophied antenna for unsettling shadings is likely to enter an empty room without some infinitesimal wariness, some remainder of the child's animistic sensitivity to the aliveness of inanimate things. More so even than the clothes we wear, the rooms we wrap around ourselves are extensions and expressions of who we are (even if we are only apers of decorators), and the evocative possibilities in these rooms have encouraged some photographers to create a significant photographic subgenre of portraits without people.

Atget's early morning-lighted Versailles gardens seem to hum with the small talk of yesterday evening's visitors; his still cafés at dawn seem to

smell of absinthe drunk the night before. Having set out dutifully to record a vanishing age in Paris, Atget ended up giving us documents with a soul. On the other end of the scale, Walker Evans fashioned a kind of reportage out of artistry and sentiment, inclining toward pre-industrial rooms of poor (hence honest) dirt farmers and studying the still lifes on bureau tops for clues to personalities for whom he may have felt (or wished to feel) something beyond an aesthetic concern. Laughlin, in his pictures of moldering town houses and plantations in Louisiana, determinedly seeks out settings as haunted by vanquished glories as Mycenae or Carthage. Like nudes and still lifes, the form persists in modes that reflect contemporary times.

In an exhibition called *Futuristic Scientific Place and Other Spaces*, seen recently at Manhattan's International Center of Photography, Lynne Cohen, a teacher of photography at the University of Ottawa, continues the venerable search for the presences in empty rooms. Her method is precise, though her documents are subtly biased. What results is both alluring and offputting. Cohen has conducted a curious search for the skin of our life and times in banquet halls, swimming pools, beauty parlors, Shriners' halls, nursing homes, apartment lobbies, waiting rooms, skating rinks, exhibition halls, model homes, and other places where humans come and go and leave their imprints. Or rather, leave almost no imprint at all, for Cohen's lugubrious conclusion seems to be that we've come

to such a pass in our cool, efficient, homogenized age that the spaces we inhabit have little more than a coincidental connection with whom we imagine ourselves to be.

As I have said, Cohen's is a biased viewpoint, and she uses her equipment and contrivances of timing to reinforce it. Her immaculate contact prints bring the smallest details under sharp scrutiny, while at the same time her view cameras flatten space, bringing everything backward or forward toward a single plane that seems just beyond reach. The effect is calculated to eliminate the sense of three dimensions, an element that matters enormously in the relationship of humans to any room; and this flattening also gives each object in Cohen's rooms a roughly equivalent importance. With no people to lend these rooms the conventional balance (by sitting in chairs, for instance, and ignoring wall plugs), the effect is to dehumanize the scenery beyond its own cool artificiality. A government employment office, perfunctorily furnished with a desk, two chairs, and one of those monstrous potted plants that might as well be artificial, comes across with such intimidating bloodlessness that it seems impossible any empathy could ever invade the place. A department store after closing, at Christmastime—a few bits of tinsel, the requisite red-and-white stockings tacked to the wall, a TV lounge chair covered with a rumpled blanket where yet another bogus Santa spent his delusory day—silently mocks the thinness of our commercial rituals.