

Reagan's 1976-80 fight against Kissinger

by Robert Zubrin

"If Henry Kissinger was put back in the State Department, Jesse Helms would commit hara-kiri on the White House lawn."

The Senate staffer who recently made this observation may have been exaggerating the response of the North Carolina senator if Kissinger were to assume a post in the new Reagan administration—but not by much. To people like Helms, a conservative Republican and longtime Reagan stalwart—and hundreds of thousands of grass-roots conservatives—Kissinger epitomizes the degeneracy of the Eastern Establishment.

In 1976, former California Governor Ronald Reagan assumed the leadership of the conservative movement when he made his bid to take the Republican presidential nomination away from President Gerald Ford and his Secretary of State Henry Kissinger. Despite the fact that Reagan's key campaign strategist, John Sears, later revealed himself to be a Kissinger partisan, Reagan nevertheless campaigned around an anti-Kissinger theme.

Reagan sounded this theme loud and clear in a campaign speech before the 1976 Florida primary. Implicitly identifying Kissinger as the real source of Ford administration foreign policy, Reagan charged that Ford had shown "neither the vision nor the leadership to halt and reverse the diplomatic and military decline of the United States." Ford and Kissinger, he said, "ask us to trust their leadership. Well, I find that more and more difficult to do. Henry Kissinger's recent stewardship of U.S. foreign policy has coincided precisely with the loss of U.S. military supremacy. . . . Under Messrs. Kissinger and Ford this nation has become Number Two in military power. . . ."

The anti-Kissinger tack buoyed up Reagan's flagging campaign after his loss in New Hampshire and carried him to within reach of the nomination by the time the Republican convention rolled around. Reagan was even preparing to offer a strong anti-Kissinger plank to the convention that would appeal to the many Ford supporters who also distrusted the secretary of state, when Sears stepped in and nixed the plan on the grounds that it was too controversial. Together with his choice of liberal Republican Senator Schweicker of Pennsylvania as his running mate, Reagan's failure to make Kissinger the major issue of the convention deprived him of the nomination.

Although Ford's defeat in the 1976 elections rendered

Kissinger's foreign policy something of a moot point, Reagan proceeded to build up a grass-roots base for his 1980 campaign.

In the 1980 New Hampshire primary, the first of the presidential campaign, Reagan came from behind to score a stunning 2-to-1 upset over his chief rival, George Bush, by making the Trilateral Commission a key issue. Reagan supporter William Loeb detailed Bush's connection to the organization, which boasted both Carter administration National Security Adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski and Henry Kissinger as officials.

Reagan himself, in a Feb. 8, 1980 speech in Florida, pointedly noted that 19 top-level members of the Carter administration belonged to the Trilateral group, including the President and Vice-President, and had his staff release their names to the press.

In a *Christian Science Monitor* interview published April 4 of this year, Reagan was asked if it were true that he would not choose Trilateral Commission members for his administration. Replied the candidate: "This has become quite such a thing, of course, with this administration's entire echelon coming from that group. I don't know anything of the things that some people are saying about this being some kind of conspiracy or something. But I haven't particularly seen people there on it that I would turn to. So because of the feeling that some people have about it, I've said that isn't the direction I would go."

Reagan was firm about the Kissinger question. As late as May, he told the *Wall Street Journal* that he could envision no situation whereby he would ask Kissinger to be his secretary of state. At other times, he flatly ruled out Kissinger for any government position.

Kissinger began to get the word through his press conduits that he would support Reagan's candidacy. He met with Reagan several times to offer "advice." During the Republican convention, Kissinger emerged from a much-publicized one-on-one meeting with Reagan to tell reporters that he and the candidate "see eye-to-eye" on most major issues.

It was at the convention that Kissinger made a brazen grab for control over Reagan by attempting to con the nominee into accepting the pathetic Gerry Ford as his "co-president." Although this particular gambit failed, Kissinger's fellow Trilateral Commission and CFR member George Bush was forced upon Reagan.