

An Analysis of Causes Leading to Resignations of Contemporary Secretaries of State

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Abstract

The Nixon administration marks the beginning of the contemporary competition between the Department of State and the National Security Council for direction of US foreign policy. Three contemporary secretaries of state William P. Rogers, Cyrus Vance, and Alexander Haig, were forced to resign with a variety of reasons.

Presidential leadership is the major cause leading to the resignation of a secretary of State. When the president plays an implementer and initiator role in the foreign policy decision-making process or when presidential leadership follows a competitive model, the secretary of state will often find himself under a heavy pressure both from the president and the national security advisor. Under these circumstances, the secretary of state will either follow presidential leadership or resign to protest the invasion of his turf by the national security advisor. When the president plays a balancer role in the foreign policy decision-making process or when presidential leadership follows a collegial model, the secretary of state usually has a bigger voice in foreign policy.

The role of either the national security advisor or White House chief of staff, which is determined by the presidential leadership, will influence the role which the secretary of state plays in US foreign policy. Secretaries of State Rogers and Vance, facing strong competition from National Security Advisors Henry A. Kissinger and Zbigniew Brzezinski, are forced to resign because they could not tolerate two secretaries of states in one administration. Alexander Haig resigned not under pressure from the president or the national security advisor but from the White House staff. Haig insisted that the secretary of state was the only spokesman for US foreign policy, disregarding president's role in it, and he antagonized the White House staff. This led to his resignation after seventeen months in office.