

## Haig's future on the line, foreign policy in flux

by Kathleen Murphy

Secretary of State Alexander Haig, already on shaky ground as a result of his remarkably inept performance of last month, has come under a new round of attacks that could signal his early departure from the Reagan administration. Some of the country's most important allies have joined in the latest outburst of criticism—not a very happy omen for a man who claimed to be qualified to act as the “vicar” of U.S. foreign policy because he was admired and respected by America's partners.

Whether that contention was ever true is doubtful. What is clear at the present time is that Haig, far from being a link between the Reagan administration and European heads of state, has become a definite liability whose continued presence in the administration could well lead to a breakdown in U.S. relations with Europe and many key developing-sector nations, including Mexico.

Although it has been known for some time in diplomatic circles that America's allies and friends have taken a dim view of Haig's antics, their criticisms have been expressed behind closed doors or in private communications. It is known, for instance, that Western European leaders were incensed by Haig's heavy-handed campaign to whip them into line behind his El Salvador provocations, and that they conveyed their anger to the White House. But this month, after Haig tried to seize control of the U.S. government the day President Reagan was shot, Haig's critics dropped diplomatic niceties and went

public, giving him a drubbing that few American secretaries of state have been subjected to.

One of the most important blasts came from French Foreign Minister Jean François-Poncet. Summing up the feeling now prevalent in Europe, François-Poncet bluntly warned in an interview that “there must be an end to Alexander Haig's pressure on Europeans.” The French foreign minister, who had met with Haig at length in Washington in late February, explained that Haig's efforts to prevent Europe from exporting capital goods to the Third World are in fact aiding the Soviet Union. If the industrialized West refuses to aid the developing sector nations, François-Poncet said, then the latter will be drawn inevitably into the Soviet orbit.

In Mexico, President José López Portillo, while skirt-ing mention of the secretary of state's name, cuttingly scored policies clearly associated with Haig in a welcoming speech April 7 for visiting Venezuelan President Herrera Campins, a Haig admirer and ally. Said the Mexican president, with whom Ronald Reagan will meet later this month if his recovery permits, “The policy of confrontation between the great powers is forcing the partisans of détente into retreat, in the face of accusations of disloyalty, confusion, or flagrant foolishness.” In an apparent allusion to the documents released by Haig which purport to prove Cuban-Soviet control of terrorism, López Portillo remarked, “The acceptance of notorious untruths or half-truths is the result of fear, or

weakness, or opportunism.”

A striking aspect of both the European and Mexican attacks on Haig is that the leaders on both sides of the Atlantic have expressed confidence in the Reagan administration, while singling out the secretary of state as an irresponsible war-monger who threatens to undermine détente and destroy world peace.

Although the official White House line is that Haig performed appropriately following the attempted assassination, there is every reason to believe that this was part of the White House effort to calm what could otherwise be an hysterical, paralyzing situation. In fact, Haig's March 30 actions deeply disturbed the President and his top aides. White House Chief of Staff James Baker has ordered a study of how key administration officials functioned during the crisis. Edwin Meese, counselor to the President, took some thinly veiled jabs at Haig's power-grabbing in an April 6 interview with the *Christian Science Monitor*. While avoiding direct criticism of Haig, Meese made it quite clear that there was no need or justification for Haig's "I am in control" announcement.

### Cooling Haig's hot spots

At the same time, the administration is moving to cool down some of the areas Haig has attempted to inflame, suggesting that the White House takes quite seriously Western Europe's alarm at Haig's maneuvers.

The White House is moving to cool the El Salvador issue, on which Haig's policies have alienated both Europe and much of Latin America. Last month, Reagan appointed his long-time associate William Clark, now Deputy Secretary of State, to head a task force on El Salvador policy, a move observers conclude was meant to rein in Haig. Last week, Vice-President Bush met with the archbishop of El Salvador, Rivera Damas, for consultations focused on achieving a political rather than military solution to the civil war there.

On Poland, Haig had taken an openly crisis-mongering line. As of April 3, his State Department spokesmen were saying that a Soviet invasion of Poland was imminent. But as soon as Haig departed for the Middle East and Europe, the White House issued its own statement that an invasion was "not inevitable and not imminent." By April 6, the State Department had reversed itself and termed an invasion "unlikely in the immediate future," adding that the purpose of Soviet/Warsaw Pact military maneuvers had thus far been to influence events in Poland.

Defense Secretary Weinberger, arriving in London enroute to a Nuclear Planning Group (NPG) meeting in Bonn, also stopped short of announcing an imminent invasion when he characterized Soviet military moves as aimed at exerting "an intimidating effect on the Poles," and asserted that the Soviets were trying to

move into Poland through "osmosis" rather than making a direct military intervention.

At the NPG meeting, Weinberger proved adaptable to European pressures when he announced that he backed their desire to pursue talks with the Soviet Union aimed at limiting the Euromissile buildup in Europe.

### Who will replace Haig?

In the midst of Weinberger's new-found public prominence, his name is being circulated by Washington insiders as a possible replacement for Haig. Not only did the two secretaries clash bitterly during the assassination-attempt crisis, as has been widely reported, but they have been at odds over the administration's proposed arms sale to Saudi Arabia, with Weinberger lobbying hard for transfer of both the AWACs and the F-15 equipment as soon as possible.

To what extent Weinberger is "playing the European game," as one acquaintance put it, or is reflecting a major policy shift dictated by Reagan and his closest advisers has yet to be determined. One good indication will be how the administration deals with the high-interest rate policy of Federal Reserve Chairman Paul Volcker, which has come under attack from Western Europe for its destructive effects on the world economy.

As for Haig, there seems to be little question that his days in the administration are numbered. Some observers believe that Haig's last chance was his Middle East trip. But the trip turned into a disaster (see International) and the major U.S. media coverage has juxtaposed the hostile reception Haig was accorded every place but Israel to the "respect" Weinberger was accorded in Europe.

Furthermore, a group of senators, headed by Majority Leader Howard Baker, is about to leave for Saudi Arabia, a trip some Capitol Hill sources report is designed to undo the damage Haig inflicted. Senator Baker consulted with President Reagan and Chief of Staff James Baker on the Saudi visit before leaving.

As one source close to Haig reported ruefully: "Al thought that if he came up smelling like a rose from the Mideast trip, he'd be set. But I'm afraid he looks more like a wilted pansy." Another insider compared Haig to "a peacock strutting off a cliff."

Meanwhile, rumors are circulating widely that if Weinberger doesn't replace Haig, maybe John Connally or George Shultz will. Shultz, a close friend of Weinberger's who worked with him at Bechtel, is a "European handler" who has taken great pains to maintain close relations with European leaders, especially Helmut Schmidt. Connally, who had sought a key cabinet post during the transition period, held a private meeting with President Reagan at George Washington Hospital on April 6.