

Bush and Baker place the President in danger

by Kathleen Klenetsky

Contrived pressures and manipulations on the part of the George Bush-James Baker III group within the White House have convinced President Reagan that the key to reversing his real and imagined popularity loss at home is a public-relations triumph at the heads-of-government summits in Europe this month. The Bush-Baker group has thus succeeded in exposing the President to a very serious security threat indeed.

Working with Baker have been Deputy Chief of Staff Michael Deaver and Baker's aide Richard Darman, as well as Alexander Haig. They have brainwashed the President into clutching at the sugarplum of staged diplomatic successes abroad at the Versailles economic summit June 4-6 and the NATO summit in Bonn June 10, while even those most loyal to Mr. Reagan have foolishly downgraded the security risks there (see article, page 42).

Perhaps the worst risk comes June 8-9 in England, whose elite is resolved to wreck the American presidency. There Mr. Reagan will meet with the Royal Family, the Prime Minister, and address the British Parliament. And the President's stop on June 7 in Rome, where he will meet with Pope John Paul II, is beset with security risks, assuming that no harm comes to him at Versailles—under the Mitterrand government, terrorists are enjoying a free-fire zone in France. Also on the itinerary is a publicity stunt in West Berlin on June 11, modeled on John F. Kennedy's legendary appearance there; West Berlin is "a security nightmare," in the words of one member of the U.S. national-security apparatus.

The Baker-Bush group has specifically manipulated

the President around the staggering failure of his economic policy by offering the hope that a beefed-up "leadership image around foreign policy" will recoup that loss. For this purpose, they have told Mr. Reagan that a number of polls show Sen. Edward Kennedy leading him were presidential elections to be held now, adding that—as with Nixon and Carter before him—the polls signify not a rise in the Senator's popularity, but a serious decline in his own.

The fifth column

Meanwhile, the man who served as Texas finance chairman for Ronald Reagan's 1980 presidential campaign has accused White House Chief of Staff James Baker III of deliberately undermining the President. In a letter sent to Reagan last month, Houston lawyer Clymer Wright accused Baker of helping to "create the image of Ronald Reagan as a vacillating President who can't formulate a program and stick to it."

Wright's letter, which was also circulated to other early Reagan supporters and contributors, charged that Baker is working at cross purposes to Reagan's economic policies and has contributed to a portrayal of the President as "an amiable, uninformed, lazy, slightly confused politician . . . a far cry from the genuine, courageous statesman we know Ronald Reagan to be."

Wright's denunciation of Baker is the latest and probably the most politically important in a series of attacks which grassroots Reagan loyalists and some conservative groups have made at Baker and Vice-President George Bush since the two Reagan rivals



James Baker III (r) with Michael Deaver.

(Baker ran Bush's primary campaign in 1980) were brought into the Reagan White House inner circle.

Since that time, Baker and Bush, old friends and political allies, have been charged with attempting to manipulate Reagan into scuttling his campaign platform and into adopting policies cooked up by the Eastern Establishment wing of the Republican Party.

The President rushed to defend Baker from Wright's attacks—going so far as to claim that his former Texas finance chairman is “sabotaging” his Chief of Staff. But Wright's allegations are right on the mark.

Baker's role

As soon as Baker persuaded Reagan to name him head of White House operations instead of Ed Meese back in January 1981, he proceeded to set his own agenda for the administration. Despite his carefully-cultivated image as a “non-ideological technocrat,” Baker was the first administration official to oppose the President on issues—including the tax cut and increased military spending—which Reagan had made the cornerstone of his policies.

He also staffed key White House posts with his own people. Typical of the appointments he made was that of Richard Darman as his top assistant. Darman, a protégé of Boston Brahmin and Club of Rome member Elliot Richardson, now controls the paper flow to the President, meaning that Reagan only gets to read what Darman thinks he should read. Baker, meanwhile, sets the President's schedule: according to a recent White House visitor, Baker has Reagan engaged in a nonstop

round of three-minute, ceremonial hand-shaking encounters, making it virtually impossible for the President to sit down and think seriously about the multitude of problems facing the nation.

Baker has also been careful to keep Reagan loyalists out of positions of influence, especially presidential counselor Ed Meese. According to a profile of Baker published in the May issue of *Texas Monthly*, Baker has consistently leaked to his media friends stories detrimental to Meese, and has teamed up with his Deputy Chief of Staff Mike Deaver to limit Meese's policymaking input.

The Anglophile element

James Addison Baker III is the scion of an old Confederate family which has been part of the British-linked Houston aristocracy for decades. His great-grandfather founded Baker & Botts, one of the top three Houston law firms. Its clients have ranged from the Gould and Harriman railroad interests to the Schlumberger Corporation, whose former head, Jean de Menil, belonged to the Perminex organization which assassinated President John F. Kennedy.

Baker's grandfather, Capt. James Baker, was a business partner and intimate friend of the notorious Col. E. M. House, the British agent who controlled the Wilson administration and promoted Britain's control over U.S. foreign policy by bringing the United States into World War I on Britain's side.

Baker is widely believed to want an even more powerful post. According to *Texas Monthly*, there are rumors that he is considering running for the Republican presidential nomination in 1984—which would mean having to do something about George Bush, who is also eyeing the spot.

Last month, the major media ran their first “exposé” of Bush since he became vice president. The story claimed that Bush had become improperly involved in lobbying to retain a tax abatement for pharmaceutical firms, even though he has held major blocks of stock in two drug companies. The *New York Times* version contained a particularly interesting note: Bush had become involved only when James Baker urged him to.

This wouldn't be the first time Baker has undercut Bush to advance his own political interests. When Bush insisted on remaining in the primary contest during the 1980 presidential campaign, even though it was clear Reagan had the nomination sewn up, Baker, his campaign manager, called a rump meeting while Bush was on the road to put an end to the campaign. Baker then held a press conference to announce that Bush was effectively out of the campaign, which the candidate only found out about when he heard it on the radio. Said another Bush aide of Baker's actions: “Baker had to cut his best friend off at the knees, and he did it.”