

...So the press disposes

Now that the U.S. government crisis is in full swing, the press, predominantly British and "American," have wasted no time to move in for the kill. We provide some examples.

The British press comments

The British press responded to the events around the White House with a spate of attacks on the Carter administration. The following is a representative sampling.

London Economist, editorial, July 14: It is a clammy hand on the tiller in Washington, and the world senses it. So does the American electorate....

Of the man who rhetorically used to ask "Why not the best?" Americans are now asking "Why not even the second, third or fourth best?"... Muddle and uncertainty have marked not just the handling of energy matters, they have marked the Carter administration as a whole... They are not the same as indecision, of which the President is often unjustly accused. In fact, Mr. Carter takes decisions and for the most part sticks to them. But he does not understand how one affects another just as he does not seem to understand the context in which he takes them. A sense of history is badly lacking in his administration... And this lack contributes to the general incoherence that characterizes the Carter presidency.

London Economist, editorial, "Night of the Long Penknives," July 21: If Tuesday turns out to have truly been a night of the long knives in which the bulk of the team is dispatched, the voters may ask "Why not before?" and "Why not the captain too?" This was, in the end, the verdict on Mr. Harold Macmillan after he got rid of a third of his cabinet and reshuffled half his junior ministers in July 1962.

The signs are that Jimmy Carter, nuclear scientist, is now going to revert to Jimmy Carter, peanut farmer.

...In truth, (Washington) is not so much an island as an orchestra without either a score or a conductor. The score should be provided by the President and his advisors in the White House... If heads are to roll, it is those in the White House that should roll first.

The London Observer, editorial, "A Weak America," July 22: Recent events in Washington and Camp David have been much more than a crisis in the internal affairs

of the United States. They are the starting point of a whole chain of crises which must end by touching us all.

...There are three major areas in which the crisis in the White House could impinge dangerously upon the whole rest of the world.

The first and most serious is that of the Atlantic Alliance. Already some NATO members are voicing doubts about the long-term validity of the American nuclear guarantee. At present concealed beneath quite legitimate demands for direct involvement in negotiations with Russia on the next SALT agreement (SALT III), these doubts are likely to be translated—if the decline of the American presidency continues—into moves to establish a European independent "deterrent."

The second area is much wider and concerns America's global relations with the Russians... Once the Senate decides one way or another on SALT, the Soviet Union may then continue to extend its own power and influence at the expense of the West... A weakened presidency is certain to encourage and accelerate the process. ...

The third area of danger is the world economy, threatened by the joint crises of the dollar and of energy costs. The collapse of the dollar, which still serves for 80 percent of the world's trading reserves, would be the quickest road to national protectionism and the stagnation of international trade with serious political effects on stability in the Third World.

The Sunday Telegraph, OpEd, "The Great Washington Upheaval," July 22: Hamilton Jordan, ...who last week became the second most powerful figure in Jimmy Carter's battered administration after the President himself, has taken to wearing a dark blue suit and a necktie instead of slopping around in grubby khakis, open-necked.

... "Ham" has suddenly adopted the soapily smooth air of a successful door-to-door Bible peddler who has just graduated to the whip-cracking role of area sales manager....

It is indeed an awesome thought that such a scruffy, disorganized and simply uncouth provincial can have been saddled with so much responsibility....

Yet, other than that he works too hard at playing the hick with straw in his hair... Jordan is a pleasant enough fellow, friendly and no more boozily boorish in the gentle way of so many middle-class southerners afflicted with mild inferiority complexes.

To give him a job with the kind of authority a man

like General Alexander Haig, the just-retired NATO commander, exercised in the White House is, to put it bluntly, quite inexplicable. And it will be very surprising if cabinet members of any calibre put up with it for long—or agree to stay under such terms.”

Daily Telegraph, July 23: Just as it was in former President Nixon's White House prior to the “Watergate” scandal, the indispensable criterion for service in the Carter administration in the future will be loyalty to both the President himself and his policies.

...Carter's absences since mid-June in Vienna to sign SALT II ... then in Tokyo for the economic summit and finally at Camp David, followed by last week's sackings, has demonstrated rather clearly that the nation's business somehow gets done no worse without him.

The U.S. press takes aim at Carter

The U.S. press didn't miss its cue: coverage of the Carter cabinet shuffle pins the blame for the government crisis on Carter's “instability.” The following is a selection.

The Baltimore Sun, editorial, “Hurricane Jimmy,” July 22: It will take a while to assess the damage and pick up the pieces from the storm that swept through the federal government in the past week, leaving the cabinet in splinters and the White House a symbol of instability...

Chances that Mr. Carter could galvanize Congress into decisive action on energy dwindled as lawmakers observed the carnage in the Cabinet...

...The President in his speech last Sunday night lamented a growing disrespect for government as a result of Watergate, Vietnam, the declining dollar and oil vulnerability. We now lament that he has contributed to this disrespect by theatrical and irresponsible actions taken with scant regard for their consequences.

Washington Star, OpEd by Richard Reeves, July 22: I traveled with him and I liked him. He...effectively manipulated the symbols of God and family and the land to give the impression of a campaign that was just a little bit above politics...

...We picked Carter.

We were wrong. Carter did not know what he was doing and did not understand the emotions he had tapped...

Last Sunday night...he spoke to 60 million...asking us to “join hands in America.” I thought it was a lousy speech—self-righteous, self-deluding and insecure...Then Carter decided to precipitate a different crisis by asking his cabinet and staff to resign...Bizarre...

The reasons didn't matter. What did matter was that it was obvious that Carter himself didn't seem to know why he did it...

...Carter seemed desperate. Probably he isn't. He's just trying to figure out another act to give the impression that he is in control—if this craziness doesn't work, he'll try something else.

Baltimore Sun, OpEd by George F. Will, July 22: Having advertised his readiness for “tough decisions,” and having said he would “make absolutely certain that nothing stands in the way” of energy goals...The gap between his rhetoric and the implications of his policies is becoming eerie...

However, Mr. Carter may understand one thing perfectly. Thinking coherently is not the most politically important thing a president can do these days. Rather, the most important thing is to be seen trying to “relate” to “average Americans.”

...For the candidate who campaigned in 1976 on the slogan, “Why Not the Best?” the best reelection strategy is to count on the electorate's radically lowered expectations, for which he is partly responsible.

The Washington Post, OpEd by Haynes Johnson, July 22: The government's not about to crumble, despite the shock waves that swept through Washington last week, and the current political spasm will pass. But once again Jimmy Carter's presidency has been shaken by new impressions of instability...

...To an extraordinary degree all of government has been affected by the shakeup/evaluation process now under way...

...Every one of the new officials undoubtedly will feel compelled to bring in his own top aides. That means...that for a time everything in the departments will stop.

New York Times, OpEd by William Safire, July 23: Late one night last week, the President of the United States unexpectedly ran across the lawn of the White House, climbed on the black wrought iron fence, listened to and later spoke to a group of demonstrators...protesting Hanoi's expulsion of the boat people.

...Consider the variety of questions...that must have gone through Mr. Carter's mind as he looked through the White House gate late that night:

Isn't there anybody who wants to run the Transportation Department? Will calling Califano a liar make it look like I'm shooting the wounded? Do I have to hold on-the-record press conferences any more? Should I worry that the Georgia bank's Carter loan ledger was destroyed, or worry that it was not destroyed? What do I say in next week's affidavit? When can I unclench my fists? Is this wrought iron fence electrified?...