

The White House and the News Media: The Phases of Their Relationship

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The legacy of Vietnam and Watergate commonly is assumed to have altered the relationship between the president and the press drastically and permanently. "I think for the most part honeymoons with presidents are over," President Carter's press secretary said, agreeing with an interviewer who suggested that the "hangover" from these crises was responsible for the shortness of the honeymoon phase. "They're sort of a thing from the past," Jody Powell continued. "The basic relationship between president and press or president and Congress has changed over the past decade. It will never be what it was."¹

Certainly some of the changes in the relationship are a result of a crisis in confidence about the believability of White House officials, including the president, that stemmed from the experience of many reporters during the Johnson and Nixon administrations. In spite of assurances from Presidents Ford and Carter that they would speak with candor and require their subordinates to do the same, many reporters adopt a style of questioning at daily briefings suitable to inquisitors trying to unveil a dark coverup. When spokesmen have announced that the White House has changed its position, reporters have asked both Ron Nessen and Jody Powell if earlier answers were "inoperative," the term used by

¹ Interview with Jody Powell by Martin Agronsky on "Agronsky at Large," Public Broadcasting System, WETA, Washington, D.C., June 24, 1977.

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President Nixon's press secretary, Ronald Ziegler, when he admitted that his earlier vehement denials of White House involvement in Watergate were inaccurate. A leading White House correspondent, Helen Thomas of United Press International, emphasized the continued prominence of memories of the Watergate era when she commented that Jody Powell "can garbage up an answer when he doesn't want you to know what he is saying; he is very Ziegleresque in that respect."²

(In contrast to this picture of dramatic, recent, permanent change, the argument is presented here that the White House and the news media are involved in a continuing relationship based on the permanent factors that affect both sides no matter who is president or who is doing the reporting. Presidents and those who serve them, as well as those who staff news organizations, have developed increasing needs for each other. The relationship that has developed is based on unwritten but inflexible rules, deeply ingrained habits, and the fact that presidents enjoy built-in advantages in their relations with the press which they have found convenient to exploit.³)

The rules and habits, which have roots that may be traced to the growth of bureaucratic routines among White House officials and news organizations, limit the options available to new administrations and newly assigned reporters. New White House officials find they are constrained in the manner in which they can use the media to get the president's message across to the public. Newly assigned reporters at the White House find that they are channeled into the same routines as their predecessors.

(From these rules, habits, and bureaucratic routines, a relationship has emerged that follows similar patterns from administration to administration regardless of changes of policy and personality among the occupants of the White House and those assigned to cover them.) Our examination of this relationship from the inauguration of Dwight D. Eisenhower to the present has led us to the view that these patterns recur with some regularity in each administration. (We suggest that the pattern of the continuing relationship between White House officials and the representatives of news organizations may be characterized in three phases: alliance; competition; and detachment.)

The view that important continuing patterns of predictable behavior could be discovered by observing the relationship between the president and the press has only recently gained currency. Presidents, it was believed, could define their own relations with the press: They could create the modern press conference, as did Franklin Roosevelt, or ignore it, as did Richard Nixon. For their part reporters viewed themselves as individual operators subject to no bureaucratic

² Quoted by Dom Bonafede in "Powell and the Press—A New Mood in the White House," *National Journal* 9, no. 6: 982.

³ For an account of the built-in advantages of presidents and their temptations to yield to them, see George Reedy, *The Twilight of the Presidency* (New York: Mentor Books, 1970), esp. pp. 100-117.

rules. Since reporters wrote most of the books and articles about White House press relations, this view prevailed.

In recent years, however, political scientists have analyzed some of the long-term connections between reporters and White House officials. In his pioneering work on the subject, *Presidential Leadership of Public Opinion*, Elmer Cornwell described the central importance of communications policy for presidential power.⁴ Cornwell demonstrated that during the twentieth century an increasingly important factor in determining the success of a president's communications policy has been the sophistication with which White House officials approached the job of organizing and coordinating the numerous offices in the White House that share in the task of communicating the president's message and image to the public. Several years later, Leon Sigal in *Reporters and Officials* offered the first detailed presentation of the process in which the continuous interweaving of the needs of reporters for news and the needs of bureaucrats for particular kinds of publicity has led each to learn to adjust and to accommodate the predictable activities of the other.⁵ More recently, in an article in this journal entitled "The Media and the Presidency: An Exchange Analysis," Francis Rourke and one of the present authors applied this theory of complementary needs to the relationship between the White House and reporters.⁶

(In the analysis that follows, the concept of phases is used to indicate the patterns of a continuing relationship which includes strong elements of cooperation and competition.) It is a concept that is based on extensive observation of the relationship at the White House between 1976 and 1978, over 100 interviews with reporters and officials at the White House, and an examination of the available papers relating to White House press operations of the administrations of Franklin Roosevelt through Richard Nixon. It is important to note at the outset, however, that our use of the terms alliance, competition, and detachment to describe the phases does not mean that we are claiming that each individual reporter or official changes his or her style of dealing with the other during the course of a president's term. What we do mean is that the number of reporters and officials behaving in one way or another changes from phase to phase. It is the behavior of most officials and reporters at a given time that enables us to differentiate one phase from the others.

Generalizations about the relationship during each phase do not apply to all officials or to all reporters, or even to individual reporters and officials all of the time. There are some officials who maintain a cooperative relationship with

reporters throughout their term in office even when their chiefs are busily feuding with every reporter in sight. For example, during the Nixon administration, Herbert Klein, Nixon's director of communications, and Gerald Warren, the deputy press secretary who handled daily briefings during the final days of the administration, maintained good relations with reporters when the relationship as a whole had become acrimonious. Some reporters are so well established that the change from one phase to another has little effect on them. David Broder of *The Washington Post* commented that he had no difficulty maintaining his contacts in the Nixon White House even during the bitterest moments of that crisis when his own newspaper was under strong attack from the administration.⁷ And reporters with specialized or regional interests are far less affected by the phases than reporters who have a general assignment to cover the president.

The phases usually appear in sequence. The period of alliance coincides with the early months of a new administration. The period of competition is generally in full swing by the end of the first year. The start of the period of detachment depends upon the sequence of events that leads both White House officials and reporters to give up on their efforts to mold the other's behavior.

PHASE ONE: ALLIANCE

During the phase of alliance a silent partnership exists between White House officials and the representatives of news organizations assigned to cover the presidency. This partnership is based on two elements: the common definition by both parties of what are newsworthy items; and the reporters' willingness to provide an unfiltered conduit to the White House for messages that the administration wishes to convey to the public. There is little conflict between the objectives of reporters and White House officials during this phase; the major news organizations are interested in presenting to their audience the same items about the administration that the White House wants publicized. The fundamental mode is cooperative.

Reporters assigned to cover the presidency on a daily basis need the cooperation of White House officials, particularly those in the press office. This is especially true at the beginning of an administration when reporters are dependent on arrangements provided by the White House for their daily provisions of information at briefings and in press releases, for coverage of the president's activities, and for travel arrangements.

Because this phase usually coincides with the euphoric early weeks of a new administration, it is popularly known as the president's "honeymoon" with the press. The term honeymoon implies the suspension of normal self-interest. It conveys the impression that the president is being given a chance by reporters to get to know his job and to relish the fruits of his newly won office for a few

⁴ Elmer Cornwell, *Presidential Leadership of Public Opinion* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1965).

⁵ Leon Sigal, *Reporters and Officials* (Lexington, Mass.: D.C. Heath and Company, 1973), especially pp. 107-11; 127-28; 136-37; and 182-83.

⁶ Francis Rourke and Michael Grossman, "The Media and the Presidency: An Exchange Analysis," *Political Science Quarterly* 91 (Fall 1976): 455-470.

⁷ Interview with David Broder (Washington, D.C., January 11, 1977).

weeks before reporters and White House officials resume their traditional role as adversaries. Although this is an element in the relationship, the alliance exists primarily because during this period the White House and the news media share the same definition of news. They are allies working toward the same objective—to obtain maximum media exposure for the new administration, its staff, and its policies

Newsworthy Items

The first item on the reporters' agendas is to profile interesting personalities—the "people" stories that are in constant demand from news editors. "It's a lot easier for me to get into several newspapers in the chain with a story about Amy than with a story about an important policy decision," noted Andrew Glass, the White House correspondent for the Cox newspapers. "If they use both, the Amy story is likely to get on page one, while the policy story will be buried on page 29."⁸

The most newsworthy person in the new administration is the president himself. Reporters are interested in three types of stories about the chief executive: human interest stories about the man himself and the people closest to him; stories about the president as policymaker, focusing on the way he conducts himself while making up his mind as to which policy positions he will choose and emphasize; and stories about the goals that he hopes to achieve and the plans he is formulating to attain them. All three types of stories are likely to be presented to the public in a manner that is favorable to the president in large part because of the habits and traditions of reporters in dealing with what they consider to be newsworthy items at this time.

"The President himself is a story, regardless of what he does," said George Reedy who served as Lyndon Johnson's press secretary.⁹ A Ford White House official observing the Carter administration preparing to take office predicted that reporters would be very interested in "personality" stories about President Carter during the early days of his term. The reporters would want to find out:

[First] Who is Jimmy Carter? What is his personality? Does he get mad? Does he golf? Does he fish in a pond? How do you find out who somebody is? You look at his friends, his habits, his manner, his character, his personality.¹⁰

The stories that result from these personal glimpses invariably are friendly to the president, as are stories that deal with the new president at work attempting to reach decisions about the direction of his administration. The same Ford of-

⁸ Interview with Andrew Glass, White House correspondent for the Cox newspaper chain, now Washington bureau chief (Washington, D.C., June 17, 1977).

⁹ George Reedy to the authors, April 19, 1976. See also Reedy, *Twilight of the Presidency*, pp. 101-103.

¹⁰ Interview with Michael Raoul Duval, special assistant to President Ford (Washington, D.C., January 4, 1977).

ficial explained why he thought that reporters would produce favorable stories about Carter at work making his mind up:

The second story is what is he doing as president? The answer is that he is developing policy. When you develop policy and the options, and [you] consult, it is almost universally attractive. That's why there is a honeymoon. It is attractive because you are not making that many decisions. You are pulling together information. You are consulting. You are listening and defining problems. Nothing is as attractive to the country and the press as dealing—or appearing to deal—with problems.¹¹

A newly inaugurated president also may receive favorable publicity when he announces such general goals as cutting back unemployment or curbing inflation. Reporters are not likely to respond critically to this type of announcement because of two deeply ingrained habits common to the production of news stories (as opposed to commentary). First, reporters present criticism in the form of a comparison between the president's rhetoric and his record. Since the president has no record at this time, his rhetoric is presented as the news story. Second, critical stories are seldom presented by reporters on their own authority—they prefer to pluck critical words from the mouths of public figures. At this early stage of an administration, however, most public figures are unwilling to criticize the president in strong, and thus newsworthy, terms because it is not yet clear in which direction the president is moving. He may be on their side and they do not want to antagonize him prematurely. Thus in the early months of his term, President Carter was spared strongly critical news stories—even in such controversial areas as the extent to which the United States should meet the new Soviet armaments build-up—until his decisions indicated whether he was coming down on the side of the "hard" or "soft" liners.

Another reason why reporters are willing to use the president's own words to describe his objectives in the early weeks of the new administration is that so many of them believe in what columnist David Broder has called the "expository period." Broder explained that when he first began to work as a journalist in Washington he learned from the widely syndicated columnist, Roscoe Drummond, that a reporter has a "responsibility to expound what a president was trying to do before he gets into the question of analyzing it and criticizing it."¹²

The Conduit Style of Reporting

During the phase of alliance, most reporters perceive their role as a conduit, that is, continuously channeling information to their news organizations in approximately the same form it is given to them. Thus, the president finds it relatively easy to dominate the agenda of the media. This style of reporting—which is characteristic of the wire services, some television news, and the smaller news

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² Interview with David Broder (January 11, 1977).

organizations during an entire presidential term—is characteristic of most reporting at this time. Because of their large audiences, the wires and networks are particularly important to the White House.

Wire service reporting requires a constant response throughout the day to scores of requests from member papers and stations. Most information provided in response to these requests is attained from the press office with only occasional assistance from other White House officials. The wire services are also expected to cover all news events at the White House. Their news budget is usually made up on the basis of the president's schedule. Later, when the wire services begin to serve as a conduit for the president's critics or for news stories critical of the president that have appeared elsewhere, this process may be reversed and the White House may base its agenda on the AP or UPI budget.¹³ But during the phase of alliance, the wire services serve as a channel for information that the White House officials want distributed to media outlets throughout the country.

Television networks are restricted in their presentation of materials by their need to present a story that can be communicated visually. The recognition of this need of the most important contemporary medium has produced a common thread in the last five administrations. "You pitch everything you have toward television," said one high-level member of President Ford's White House staff.¹⁴ And Jody Powell, citing Theodore Roosevelt's appraisal of the presidency as a bully pulpit, stressed that the "pulpit now is CBS, NBC, and to some extent the wires."¹⁵

PHASE TWO: COMPETITION

An end comes to the alliance between the White House and the news media when reporters become interested in news stories that emphasize the administration's involvement in controversies and conflicts among personalities and over policies. An activist president who has made clear policy commitments provides reporters with stories about conflicts with adversaries over policy as well as stories about conflicts among presidential supporters over which tactics should be used to win the policy battle. In the case of less active presidents, the passage of time usually provides reporters with the opportunity to produce stories about conflicts among advisers who are urging policy commitments, or at the very least stories about which adviser or cabinet official is currently on top of the White House pecking order. The shared definition of newsworthy items that led to stories supportive of the president and his policies during the phase of alliance dissolves in the phase of competition. Presidents find, as did John F. Kennedy

¹³ Interview with Frank Cormier, White House correspondent for the Associated Press (Washington, D.C., March 4, 1977).

¹⁴ Background interview, White House official, Ford administration (Washington, D.C., December, 1976).

¹⁵ Interview with Jody Powell (Washington, D.C., January 11, 1977).

when asked about his reaction to press coverage, that they are "reading more and enjoying it less."¹⁶

During this phase, the president and White House officials become unhappy with the media that, from their perspective, is now focusing on either the wrong aspect of the story or the wrong story entirely. To deal with what they see as critical stories, the president and his staff can respond to the source of the criticism, to its messenger, or to both. If the source is known, he or she can be answered; if unknown, the leak must be traced to its source. "I never saw either president for whom I worked [Kennedy and Johnson] so mad as when they were upset over leaks," Walt Rostow told an interviewer.¹⁷ If presidents themselves do not attempt to track down the individual who passed unauthorized information to the press, their aides do it for them, as did Jody Powell who admitted at a briefing that he had questioned a large number of White House aides when trying to find the source of a *New York Times* story that President Carter had become a "recluse" in the White House. Sometimes these efforts have unanticipated results. Pierre Salinger discovered that the president who sent him to track down leaks was often the culprit himself.¹⁸

The phase of competition is characterized by the chief executive's attempts to manipulate his relations with the news media. There is a retrenchment from the open presidency; the White House specifies the conditions under which officials may talk to reporters and seeks to curb unauthorized disclosures of information. White House officials usually opt for three approaches during this phase: news management, ingratiation, and attack.

News Management

News management involves the manipulation by the president and his advisers of the kinds of information that will be made available to reporters and of the forums in which information is given to them. Events such as trips are planned where reporters are more likely to be forced to accept the White House versions of what is going on since they have access only to officials and can observe only the ceremonies and parades of the trip. Of course there are many additional reasons why presidential travel may be scheduled by the president and his advisers, but White House aides indicated their awareness of the advantages travel gives to them in controlling the media's agenda and determining the flow of news and pictures to the public.

A second technique of news management is the manipulation of access. During the competition phase White House officials are more likely to evaluate each

¹⁶ News conference of May 9, 1962, *Kennedy and the Press, The News Conferences* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1965), p. 239.

¹⁷ Interview with W.W. Rostow, National Security Advisor to Presidents Kennedy and Johnson (Austin, Texas, July 9, 1976).

¹⁸ Pierre Salinger, *With Kennedy* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1968), pp. 60-61

contact with reporters in terms of how much they get out of them before they are arranged. The files of the presidential libraries provide evidence of this concern. In the Johnson Library, on a letter to George Reedy (who was then serving as press secretary) from Dan Rather requesting permission to film the White House staff at work, Lyndon Johnson noted in the margin, "this man and CBS are out to get us any way Bill Paley can. Tell him you have much more work than you can handle and these men are workers on routine, not actors."¹⁹

News management also involves the attempt to manipulate the forums in which information is given—press conferences, briefings, backgrounders, and interviews—by holding them less frequently, by changing the ground rules, by not providing as much information, and by burying reporters under piles of information. These settings, especially the presidential press conference, have become high-risk forums. An associate director of the Ford administration's office of communications predicted that the risks will ultimately outweigh the benefits for President Carter. His predictions are supported by the experiences of Carter's predecessors, from Kennedy to Ford:

Carter's going to find exactly what every other president has found and that is the president's desire to portray his policies accurately and in a positive light invariably runs at cross purposes with the press's cynicism. . . . [Eventually] there's going to be some bad economic news two days before a scheduled press conference or there's going to be some other major story developing over which he has no control and about which he is not going to want to comment. And then the press conferences will stop. It is not a conscious evil decision to evade the press, but more a desire to answer those questions that you want to answer in a way that you want to answer them.²⁰

Although this prediction was not borne out by President Carter, who through June 1978 kept to his promised average of two conferences a month, the president has on at least two occasions declared that certain kinds of questions could not be asked. The White House also manipulated the schedule during the Bert Lance affair in 1977 to give the president a reprieve from embarrassing questions while at the same time maintaining his average of two press conferences a month.

The success of individual officials and reporters in getting results from manipulative techniques depends in part on relations established during the early days of the new administration. More important to the success of the White House is its ability to place the president in dramatic national and international settings and situations during which news organizations seem compelled to follow the agenda set before them. Ultimately, however, White House officials must face the problem that the two sides no longer share a common definition of news. Consequently, the administration finds it more difficult to prevent the media from producing stories that raise issues in ways it does not want them

¹⁹ LBJ notes on a letter from Dan Rather to George Reedy, April 20, 1964, PR18 files, Lyndon Johnson Library.

²⁰ Interview with William Rhatican (Washington, D.C., December, 1976).

raised, bestowing reputations that are not helpful from the White House's point of view, and conveying messages that the White House would prefer to have remained unsent.

Ingratiation

Ingratiation, the attempt to manipulate reporters by providing favors to them, usually involves rewarding some reporter or reporters with exclusive information. For example, a select group of editors or reporters may meet with a White House official at a specially arranged "backgrounder" where they are given information that, they are told, is usually provided exclusively to the highest officials in the administration. Ingratiation may also mean providing for the material needs and accommodations of reporters who travel with the president or granting an exclusive interview with the president or other high official to a reporter who gets his or her stories "straight" from the White House perspective. This undoubtedly was the case with the interview granted to Garnett Horner of the *Washington Star* by President Nixon immediately after his electoral triumph in November 1972. Such rewards are intended to have the concurrent effect of punishing those reporters who had "distorted" the White House's position and actions.

Ingratiation can be a subtle and effective technique during the period of competition when used to convert, through distraction, a potentially serious adversary in the press. A high-level Johnson administration spokesman described one such case involving a prominent reporter who had written critical stories about the administration. According to this official, LBJ said that the proper response to this situation was "to throw them a piece of meat when they are nipping" at your behind. He asked the spokesman to arrange for the reporter to receive briefings and interviews on administration plans that would give him a considerable head start on other reporters covering the White House. The tactic worked as the reporter devoted himself to his new opportunity to write stories that described the president's plans, giving them an almost guaranteed front page play. According to the spokesman, the reporter chose to believe that he was a trusted and highly valued newsman and did not appear to consider the possibility that he was being used by the White House.²¹

Attack

The technique of attack is the most extreme weapon in the president's arsenal during the phase of competition. It involves efforts by the White House to overcome what it sees as setbacks in the president's ability to lead and persuade caused by unfavorable reporting. Attack includes efforts to discredit (or get

²¹ Background interview, White House official, Johnson administration (Washington, D.C., February 1976).

discharged) a particular reporter, to damage a news organization, and in the most extreme cases to challenge the legitimacy of the media itself.

Some of the manifestations of attack show up in almost every administration, and the implied threat of possible retaliation by the White House may make some reporters pull in their horns if they see a minor story that is potentially damaging to the president. Some reporters may even profit from the widespread paranoia about press enemies that has afflicted so many recent administrations.

A few words of sympathy over the unfair treatment by the "Eastern press" (or the liberal press or the conservative press) is an effective method of slamming doors against competitors. An important leader who can be persuaded that his journalistic "friend" is the lone holdout against a "press conspiracy" can serve as a meal ticket for many years.²²

All-out attack on the media has been the characteristic of only one recent administration. The assault on wide segments of all forms of media by the Nixon administration was well planned and well coordinated and obviously struck positive responses among large numbers of citizens who indicated that their distrust of the media was nearly as great as their distrust of the political leadership.²³ The ultimate impact of the Nixon administration's efforts to exploit popular dissatisfaction with and hostility toward the news media may have led, after Nixon's downfall, to a situation in which large segments of the public believe neither the president nor those who report on and analyze the activities of his administration.

To cope with manipulation by the White House, reporters develop manipulative tactics of their own to pry loose information that the White House would prefer to withhold. During the phase of alliance, most reporters adopt the conduit style of reporting. During the phase of competition a reporter may become a friend of the court, an adversary, a historian-observer, or an institutional analyst. Many reporters do not change, but these more aggressive styles are particularly noticeable on the part of reporters for the major publications that set the tone for national reporting.

The Friend of the Court

This reporter's work depends on information obtained from White House sources in return for supportive articles. In some cases this may involve flattery or ingratiation of a particular official, including the president himself. One correspondent during the Johnson administration sent the president a picture of his

den wall on which hung nine pictures of Johnson and the reporter.²⁴ Not surprisingly, the reporter was regarded as a favorite of the administration.

Most reporters who employ the friend of the court technique are somewhat less sycophantic. One correspondent described it as almost a psychoanalytical tactic for getting news. "Instead of asking them for news, you discuss their problems with them," he said, "and eventually they tell you more than they intend."²⁵ Other reporters who use this technique maintained that this tactic did not involve writing favorable stories but stories that indicated an understanding of a point of view of the officials.

The Adversary

This reporter approaches White House encounters from the perspective that officials may not be telling the truth or at the very least are withholding part of the story. Most White House reporters who take on this role limit it to the combative style with which they approach officials in public forums such as briefings. Reporters who employ this technique told us that it paid off because officials did not want to be confronted with a lie in public. The combative style of questioning does not necessarily translate into an accusatory style of writing. One of the best known practitioners of this style at the White House is Helen Thomas of United Press International. But readers of Thomas's stories would not be aware of how aggressively she questions officials at briefings. Like most wire service reporters, her stories provide a report of what has happened.

The Historian-Observer and Institutional Analyst

Some reporters become historian-observers in response to the White House's manipulative tactics during the phase of competition. Those who adopt this style of reporting interpret both the policies and the personalities who make and administer these policies in terms of the mood of the times. The advantage of this style for reporters is that their stories deal with the character of the administration and are thus less influenced by the "hard news" that during this phase often consists of "pseudo-events" staged by the White House.

Related to reporters who choose the style of the historian-observer are the institutional analysts whose beat includes the entire White House staff and executive office of the president. Officials who have worked at the White House during the last 16 years suggested to interviewers that in their minds this would be the best way of finding out what was going on at the White House. The single greatest problem reporters have in accurately portraying the presidency, according to these respondents, stems from the fact that newsmen concentrate almost exclusively on the president and those who have contact with him in the

²² Reedy, *Twilight of the Presidency*, p. 115.

²³ See Porter, *Assault on the Media* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: University of Michigan Press, 1976) for a chronological presentation of the relationship between the Nixon administration and the White House with particular emphasis on the attack technique.

²⁴ Material obtained from PR18 files, Lyndon Johnson Library.

²⁵ Andrew Glass interview (Washington, D.C., October 12, 1976).

oval office. The officials further suggested that what reporters could look at more profitably is the whole executive process, including the flow of alternative policies as they are sent from office to office before they finally land on the president's desk. The part of the story that reporters miss is the selection process of policy alternatives. The manager of this flow of information in the White House during the Ford administration suggested that the people making these important decisions are virtually unknown to reporters because they seldom are visible in conferences with the president and his top advisers.²⁶

PHASE THREE: DETACHMENT

The manipulative tactics used by both sides during the competition phase create antagonisms between White House reporters and White House officials that are most visible in settings such as the press secretary's daily briefing which one former White House correspondent referred to as "bear pit."²⁷ There appears, however, to be a limit to how far conflict may spread. Both sides have such fundamental needs for each other that strong elements of cooperation remain at all times. Consequently the phase of competition is followed by a phase of detachment during which the relationship is carried on in a more structured, and almost formal, manner than in the previous periods.

Detachment is a phase that is usually determined by the White House. It occurs earliest in those administrations in which there is little concern for the need to rally massive support for new policies. Since there is little need to persuade reporters to emphasize the advantages of their policies to the public, the White House's media policy becomes an effort to secure maximum exposure with the least amount of risk. In the years since the onset of the New Deal, it is not surprising to find that detachment usually occurs sooner and is employed more successfully by Republican than Democratic administrations.

The most important feature of this period is the tendency of presidents to delegate their relations with the press to surrogates. The president tends to see reporters in highly controlled and structured situations. Press relations are routinized in the press office rather than carried on throughout the White House.

The third phase is often brought on when a president decides to run for reelection. Because the stakes are now greater, his contacts with reporters are more likely to be carefully structured than they were in the middle years of his term. His staff will be particularly calculating as they arrange the president's press contacts. This was evident during the 1976 campaign when the office of communication was converted from a subsidiary of the press office to a major area

of decision making in the election campaign. A Ford official described the process in this manner.

Once you are in here, you can predict what the press is going to do with a story. It is almost by formula. Because of this they are usable. . . . You look at how you are projecting on philosophy, policies, personality, and the blend. You figure out how you will project in each of these areas. If you know [in advance] how the press will react, then you can act accordingly.²⁸

Consequently, during this period the president's staff spends increasing amounts of time arranging the chief executive's activities in order to project his image and message while freeing him to spend more time on the substance of the campaign and less with the press.

It was under these circumstances in 1976 that the White House employed a tactic that was used by every incumbent president who campaigned for reelection since 1952. In 1976, the plan, which reporters called the "Rose Garden strategy," worked in this manner: White House officials knew that the news media felt bound to run at least one story about the president each day during the campaign, even if that meant covering an activity that ordinarily would not be considered newsworthy. President Ford was thus limited by his managers to one highly structured and controlled appearance before the news media, but one in which he appeared "presidential" by participating in a ceremonial activity. At the same time, Governor Carter was appearing at four or five events each day at which he might be besieged by hecklers from the anti-abortion crusade or where his campaign fatigue might show. Frequently, the event that created the most disruption of the campaign schedule would become the featured story on the same television news program that showed President Ford in the White House rose garden. As a result of this type of coverage, the advisers to incumbents are likely to keep the media at a distance. This point was noted by Carter's campaign press secretary, Jody Powell, who said that the tendency of the media to emphasize the embarrassing moments of political leaders leads to "institutional pressures toward inaccessibility" which translates to mean that presidential advisers will keep the president's appearances limited to media events where he will not pass under too close scrutiny.²⁹

Another aspect of the detachment phase is the White House's relatively greater emphasis on contact with the regional press and with interest groups. The president and his aides find advantages in dealing with the regional press or interest groups without the filter of the Washington press corps. Furthermore, the administration can channel information to the regional and specialized presses where they see it as having the most value for the president. For example, in a two-week period during April 1971, the White House prepared 18

²⁶ Interview with James Connor, Secretary to the Cabinet (Washington, D.C., December 6 1976).

²⁷ Interview with Edward T. Folliard, former White House correspondent for the *Washington Post* (Washington, D.C., January 22, 1976).

²⁸ Background interview, White House official, Ford administration (Washington, D.C., December, 1976).

²⁹ Jody Powell interview (January 11, 1977).

separate mailings that were sent to 146,000 groups, publications, or individuals. Samples of the mailings indicate that they included environment and reorganization booklets sent to 1,100 reporters and news organizations; a statement by the president opposing abortions to 198 Catholic news organizations; a labor mailing to 1,364 labor and finance writers; a senior citizens proclamation that was sent to 100,000 groups concerned with the aging; and a copy of an article by the conservative columnist James Jackson Kilpatrick that was sent to 9,273 academics and Republicans.³⁰

The response of some reporters during this phase is to begin to explore the use of investigative techniques involving attempts to reach independent sources of information in Congress, the Office of Management and Budget, the departments, and among lobbyists. Reporters are also more likely to engage in joint endeavors with other reporters in their own news organizations and thus reap some of the benefits from the division of labor and specialized expertise in the form of a more thorough analysis of what the White House is trying to do.

THE FUTURE OF THE CONTINUING RELATIONSHIP

The emphasis in this article has been on the permanent characteristics of the relationship between the White House and the news media. The fact that both sides are locked into a close and cooperative relationship by their mutual need is balanced by their need to exploit each other. The rules and habits of the relationship perpetuate themselves because of the importance of the latent functions they perform. The complexity of the organizational worlds of both the White House and news organizations required arrangements that form the basis for the continuation of the major features of the relationship from one administration to the next. In theory, it would be possible for a president to alter radically the basis of the relationship, but such efforts were made and failed during the Johnson and Nixon administrations. Thus, Gerald Ford and Jimmy Carter recognized that attempts to effect those sorts of changes are not only undesirable but also potentially damaging. Reporters' styles of covering the White House today show some residual strains from the era of Vietnam and Watergate. Many correspondents eagerly demonstrate in their public conduct at briefings or television talk shows that they do not trust the White House. Nevertheless, the actual manner in which reporters go about their routines in producing stories at the White House would be familiar to observers of the Eisenhower, Kennedy, or early Johnson years.

Yet the fact that it may be described as a "continuing" relationship does not mean that there have been no changes. Most noteworthy, perhaps, is that the relationship itself has become news. Whereas at one time the difficulty reporters might have in getting interviews or information was regarded as their own prob-

lem, today it may be featured on the evening news. The fact that Gerald Ford and Jimmy Carter have regarded good media relations as a basic policy objective of their administrations is undoubtedly a result of the increasingly public nature of the relationship and of the public's interest in and awareness of the importance of the media.

A second change that can be observed is that the institutional changes brought about during the phases of one administration are carried over to the next. For example, the bureaucratic organizations of both the White House and the media have resulted in the creation of permanent offices in the White House that permit the president to develop relations with editors, publishers, the regional press, and interest groups even while he is still developing his relations with the White House press corps. The structured mode of the period of detachment could be seen early in the Carter administration in examples such as the twice-monthly scheduled meetings with editors and publishers, the regional town meetings, and phone-ins. Perhaps most significant of all was President Carter's employment of Patrick Caddell, a pollster, at the beginning of his term.

The assertion of the typical pattern of the phases can be seen if we look at a president's effort to be different and presumably "more open" than his predecessors. When President Carter began his term, the office of public liaison, which had been an important vehicle for rallying the support of interest groups and regional political leaders to the White House, was transformed, under Midge Costanza, into an office at the White House where outsiders such as the Gay Liberation Front could get a hearing. By 1978, Costanza was moved to the White House basement and shortly thereafter she resigned. Anne Wexler was appointed to a position of representative to interest groups that appeared to be very much like that of the old director of the office of public liaison, even if she did not hold that title as 1978 drew to a close.

A second example of the reappearance of the traditional pattern may be seen in President Carter's appointment of Gerald Rafshoon, who handled public relations and advertising during his campaigns for governor of Georgia and as president, as a senior adviser to serve as coordinator of White House publicity functions. Rafshoon, whose appointment was announced during the summer of 1978 when Carter's status in the polls had seriously declined, occupied a position that appears to be similar to or even more important than that of the director of the office of communications in the Nixon and Ford administrations.

In summary, it appears that throughout the terms of all recent presidents, the relationship between the president and the news media has been characterized by strong elements of continuity. No recent president has been so successful in his dominance over Congress, the bureaucracy, his political party, or private sector leaders that he has been able to downgrade media relations from its position in administration policymaking. For their part, no major news organization has been able to find ways of covering the presidency without the cooperation of the president and White House officials. When the needs of both sides converge, as they usually do at the beginning of an administration, the cooperative

³⁰ U.S., Congress, Senate, Select Committee on Presidential Campaign Activities, "Mailings and Distributions," April 12-17, 19-24, 1971, memorandum.

elements are dominant. Later, when the president's need to use the news media to build a basis of support for his administration conflicts with reporters' interests in producing stories that feature conflict and inconsistency, each side uses manipulative tactics to achieve their goals. Yet the level of conflict that might be engendered by some of these tactics is limited by continuing mutual needs. That is why detachment follows the phase of competition in the relationship between the White House and the news organizations as a period of detente that lasts until a new president takes office and the process begins again.*