

NIXON THE OBAMA CAMPAIGN GOES TO CHINA

✘ One of the most telling anecdotes in this must-read Edward Luce skewer of the way a small circle of Obama advisors (Rahm, David Axelrod, Valerie Jarrett, and Robert Gibbs) dominates his Administration is this story about his trip to China.

On Mr Obama's November trip to China, members of the cabinet such as the Nobel prizewinning Stephen Chu, energy secretary, were left cooling their heels while Mr Gibbs, Mr Axelrod and Ms Jarrett were constantly at the president's side.

The White House complained bitterly about what it saw as unfairly negative media coverage of a trip dubbed Mr Obama's "G2" visit to China. But, as journalists were keenly aware, none of Mr Obama's inner circle had any background in China. "We were about 40 vans down in the motorcade and got barely any time with the president," says a senior official with extensive knowledge of the region. "It was like the Obama campaign was visiting China."

Coming as it does in an article that compares Obama's Administration to Nixon's...

And barring Richard Nixon's White House, few can think of an administration that has been so dominated by such a small inner circle.

The story really highlights the dangers of such a close-knit group dominating Administration policy: on a visit to China, our relationship with which is one of the most challenging policy

issues we face, we've got tourists dominating the policy, not experts.

As much as I'm thrilled the story repeats calls to replace Rahm, I think the real story is the suggestion that Obama's cabinet members are growing tired of being treated as "minions" by Rahm. The story names four by name: Kathleen Sebelius, Ken Salazar, Janet Napolitano, and (above) Steven Chu.

Perhaps the biggest losers are the cabinet members. Kathleen Sebelius, Mr Obama's health secretary and formerly governor of Kansas, almost never appears on television and has been largely excluded both from devising and selling the healthcare bill. Others such as Ken Salazar, the interior secretary who is a former senator for Colorado, and Janet Napolitano, head of the Department for Homeland Security and former governor of Arizona, have virtually disappeared from view.

Administration insiders say the famously irascible Mr Emanuel treats cabinet principals like minions. "I am not sure the president realises how much he is humiliating some of the big figures he spent so much trouble recruiting into his cabinet," says the head of a presidential advisory board who visits the Oval Office frequently.

With the suggestion that Sebelius, for example, has been "excluded both from devising and selling the healthcare bill," are we to understand that all of these cabinet officials are not intimately involved in setting policy? We've got Steven Chu, one of the best cabinet picks in the Administration, cooling his heels rather than the climate? And what are Sebelius, Salazar, and Napolitano advising that is not being heard? Is Sebelius growing tired of Rahm fucking up what should be her portfolio (after which, as happened last week, she has to go to

Congress and get grilled on it)?

And then, of course, there's an even more notable cabinet member that goes unmentioned: Hillary Clinton. She showed up prominently in the pictures from China, but she is not mentioned in this story as either one of those (like Joe Biden) who regularly gives Obama counsel but is not part of this inner circle, or one of those prominent cabinet members that Rahm treats like a minion. But the story does note how Arab-Israeli peace took a back seat to Rahm's failed attempt to pass health care reform. Whether or not Hillary (or, more likely, her inner circle; John Podesta is one of the few named sources for it) is a source for this article, I can imagine how seeing a failed attempt to pass healthcare stall attempts to bring peace to Palestine would rankle Secretary Clinton.

So, yes, this is another story pointing to growing dissatisfaction with Rahm from allies both inside and outside the Administration. But note clearly, it appears to be very high level dissatisfaction.