Chapter Five

The President, Policy Implementation, and the Short Road to Camp David

President Nixon only now enters the analysis to any great extent. His belated appearance accurately reflects the argument of the study in general and of this chapter in particular that the major variables explaining the decision to close the gold window lay not in the Oval Office but elsewhere. The president, for a variety of reasons, did no more than rubber-stamp the recommendation of the decision paper formally presented to him by the Volcker Group in June 1969. The dominant influences on his administration's policy remain the consensus uniting administration officials on the primacy of national autonomy and the structure and process of the administration's policy making.

Moreover, the president's endorsement of the Volcker Group's recommendation accomplished less in terms of establishing actual U.S. policy than it might at first appear. The group recommended that the United States adopt what it labeled an approach of "negotiated multilateral evolution" vis-à-vis the Bretton Woods regime. But this did not represent a coherent approach to policy; instead, it reflected the efforts of the Volcker group to meld disparate policy initiatives. The recommendation's predominant appeal lay in its ability to command the support of a variety of officials whose interests were incompletely congruent.

Actual U.S. international monetary policy between 1969 and 1971, therefore, was set not by presidential decision but to a large extent