

THE PERISCOPE

AHEAD OF THE NEWS

LBJ Backs Off His European Tour

President Johnson is having second thoughts about a trip to Europe this spring. Ludwig Erhard was West German Chancellor when LBJ agreed to visit Bonn. But the President would like to postpone the trip now that Kurt Kiesinger has taken over. Kiesinger's Nazi past poses some embarrassment and so does his plan to work more closely with France. LBJ also had hoped to visit France, but Charles de Gaulle so far has shown no interest in extending an invitation.

Shake-up in Vietnam

The entire pacification program in Vietnam may be taken out of civilian hands and placed under the command of Gen. William Westmoreland. White House displeasure with the slow pace of the program—which is attempting to switch peasant allegiance from the Viet Cong to Saigon—has already prompted a shake-up of civilians in the U.S. mission. Top Administration officials reportedly were “fed up” with the disorganized field operations of the U.S. Information Agency, the Agency for International Development and the CIA. The civilian setup was reorganized along military lines with Deputy Ambassador William Porter acting as commander. But Washington sources warn that if the new line-up doesn't begin to produce results in six months, Westmoreland will take over.

Why the Fighting Has Quieted

There has been comparatively little ground combat in Vietnam in recent days—and for an unusual reason. Viet Cong forces, in addition to regrouping after several recent defeats, are busy bringing in the rice harvest. U.S. intelligence says that from now until February, the guerrilla forces will be tied up by the effort to collect rice and store it in safe areas.

INSIDE STORY

Step-up in the Nuclear Arms Race

What's behind reports of the extensive deployment of a Soviet anti-ballistic-missile system and increased production of Red ICBM's? According to top U.S. analysts, the primary aim of the Russian nuclear buildup is more to bolster Kremlin military prestige within the Communist bloc than to intensify the Soviet threat to the U.S. While such a threat cannot be dismissed entirely, the analysts say, it does not now justify a full-scale Nike-X defense network that could cost \$30 billion or more—and, to be

effective, would require a nationwide fallout shelter system. The Joint Chiefs of Staff want a “limited” \$5 billion to \$10 billion ABM system to maintain a rough defense parity.

No Squelching Robert Welch

Reports in John Birch circles that founder and president Robert Welch soon will step down as unchallengeable chief of the conservative society are incorrect. Welch, who is 67, tells close associates that if his health, which he says is excellent, holds up, he will remain in office for another ten years. Meanwhile, fewer right-wingers have been joining the organization. The new-member enlistment rate in California, a Birch stronghold, has dropped from 1,000 a month a year ago to 450.

Flight Pattern for the SST

The supersonic transport evaluation report will arrive on LBJ's desk this week without any solid finding on the troublesome problem of sonic boom. Studies by NASA and North American Aviation on ways to soften the boom have drawn a blank so far. Therefore, the Federal Aviation Agency is expected to stick to its original plan: build the best possible long-range, high-payload SST even if it can only use transoceanic routes. Over the U.S., the sonic boom might be kept at tolerable levels by “off-loading,” or reducing the flying weight of the plane. If that stratagem doesn't work, the FAA might ask the aircraft industry to build a scaled-down version of the intercontinental SST. Meanwhile, Boeing and Lockheed—the two competitors for the \$2 billion SST contract—have a new worry. They fear that other budget priorities (i.e. Vietnam, poverty) might cause the President to put off for months his scheduled January announcement of the winning design.

Nizer for the Warren Report

The Warren commission report on the Kennedy assassination will soon get a self-appointed defense attorney. Lawyer and best-selling author Louis Nizer is negotiating with the TV networks to defend the commission's findings, possibly in face-to-face encounters with such report critics as Mark Lane. Nizer claims the controversy surrounding the report has become a “libelous wave against our country's integrity.”

Putting Off a Tax Hike

President Johnson won't get fast action from Congress if he does ask for a tax increase in January. Chairman Wilbur Mills of the House Ways and Means Committee plans to work on the complex subject of social-security revision