

LBJ's '2-Gun' Tag Undeserved

By Drew Pearson

In various foreign countries, including those friendly to the USA, President Johnson is getting the reputation of being a 2-gun Texan on foreign policy. He is accused of shooting from the hip.



Pearson

This results from the image of Texans created by Hollywood and probably would be inevitable for any Texan who occupied the White House.

The real fact is, however, that the President has conducted foreign policy on a more even keely than any other recent President, certainly up until the current Viet-Nam crisis. Even during this difficult period he has been calm and collected.

One day after the first raids on North Viet-Nam, a caller found him working in his office until 9 p.m. on such problems as the dollar imbalance, appointments to the Federal Power Commission, racial and religious bigotry, and the farm program.

He looked tired, having been up most of one night during the Viet-Nam raids and was awakened the second night with two cabled reports from Saigon. He was worried over loss of American lives. But he

was concentrating on the many difficult jobs facing an American President, as well as the almost impossible solution of the Indochinese impasse which he inherited.

Before the recent crisis, senior members of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee have been impressed with the even-tempered conduct of foreign policy under Mr. Johnson. He has fallen back on his experience as Senate Majority Leader when he specialized on getting opposing sides to work together.

Moscow, Washington

Some Senators felt that he did not understand the factors behind the flag-burning incident in Panama last year; also that he was a little hasty in turning off Guantanamo water. But on the other hand he refused to fire back when President de Gaulle took side-swipes at the United States.

And the advice he gave Chancellor Erhard of Germany to explore avenues of better understanding with the Russians is considered the most stabilizing move recently made in Russian-German relations.

The President's most important foreign affairs achievement, however, was his steady buildup of confidence between Moscow and Washington, which began with his sale of American wheat to Russia a year ago. This was followed by

careful, well-timed moves to reduce arms both in the United States and the Soviet Union, a cutback in plutonium, a consular treaty, scrapping of some bomber types and, more recently, the proposal of a Johnson-Kosygin exchange of visits.

This was not the work of a 2-gun Texan, and it had achieved more confidence between two hitherto suspicious countries than at any time since the war. Whether this will be upset by the Viet-Nam crisis remains to be seen. But it should be noted that before the Viet-Nam retaliation, President Johnson had authorized a third government to sound out the Chinese about a truce whereby the United States would withdraw from South Viet-Nam if the Chinese would end guerrilla warfare in that area. This was rejected.

In contrast to Mr. Johnson's even-keel conduct of foreign affairs, diplomats recall the Korean War and the Berlin airlift under Harry Truman; his sudden statements about dropping the A-bomb in Korea, which brought Prime Minister Clement Attlee scurrying across the Atlantic from London; his scolding of Stalin for turning up late at Potsdam, and various other 2-gun statements.

2-Gun President

They also recall the mercurial foreign policy of Dwight Eisenhower which welcomed

Khrushchev to Washington one month, then had him bellowing over the U-2 incident; a policy which lost Cuba to Castro, landed troops in Lebanon, had the 7th Fleet scurrying all around the China coast in the crisis over Formosa, and which proposed landing troops in Viet-Nam, then finally backed away from it.

President Kennedy also conducted foreign affairs, at times, more like a 2-gun Texan than a Harvard man from Boston. Diplomats recall how he announced in February, 1961, that we would never retreat in Laos, then pulled out of Laos a few months later; how he flew 50,000 troops to West Germany, then pulled them out later; how he waited to confer with Khrushchev until after he was in a weakened position as a result of the Bay of Pigs fiasco.

It was mercurial foreign policy and the deterioration of our relations both with Cuba and Russia that led to the Cuban missile crisis. In the end, Mr. Kennedy handled this with masterful skill.

President Johnson may have such a crisis in Viet-Nam right now. But up to now, he has been anything but a 2-gun Texan. Now that he is in it, however, he is exerting the old college try on his Senate friends to an unprecedented degree, as will be revealed in an early column.