

Johnson and His Use of U.S. Power

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President Johnson is no longer "untested" on the world scene. He is experiencing the same frustrating cycle of crisis upon crisis that so often absorbed President Kennedy's time and talents.

As a result, it now is possible to glimpse—if not to define—

Mr. Johnson's idea of the proper uses of the United States power in the world, and to find some pattern

in his manner of exerting it. He has not spoken, as President Kennedy did, of "limitations" on the American power to influence world events. Instead, he has made at least two far-reaching commitments of that power—his pledge not to be driven out of South Vietnam and his promise that no new Communist regime would be set up in the Western Hemisphere.

He has reacted to events with military force in at least three cases—in the Gulf of Tonkin last summer, in the air above North Vietnam last winter, and the Dominican Republic last week.

A Hard Line on Other Issues

Mr. Johnson has also frequently displayed a hard line that stopped short of military force. He stood fast against opinion even within his Administration that he should negotiate a new canal treaty with Panama, until his terms were met. He retaliated economically against Premier Fidel Castro when the water supply at the Guantanamo Naval Base was threatened.

It seems possible to generalize, therefore, in at least these directions:

¶The President has no great reluctance to exert power directly and forcefully and has so far displayed no apprehension about its "limitations."

¶He seems to put specific American interests, as he perceives them, above more abstract concerns—"world opinion," for instance, or Latin-American sensitivity to "intervention."

It would probably be too strong to label Mr. Johnson a hard-line or "big stick" President. He backed away cautiously, for instance, when it became clear that the European allies were not ready to accept the

Specific Interests Of Nation Put First

idea of a nuclear-armed fleet with international crew.

He has avoided testy exchanges with President de Gaulle.

And the essence of Mr. Johnson's political career has been to avoid irrevocable identification with any particular "line," philosophy or position, to retain greater freedom of action.

Moreover, there is good evidence that he has frequently been the restraining voice in his own councils. He refused to take a second military action in the Gulf of Tonkin because he was not sure there had been a second provocation. He did not send marines to Guantanamo, despite the advice of some aides.

Has Great Support

Still, Mr. Johnson has attained as great a degree of support from Republican and other conservatives in and out of Congress as any President in the postwar years, not excluding Dwight D. Eisenhower. And he has brought frequent distress to those whose emphasis is less on "resisting Communism" than it is on "easing tensions" and improving the United States' standing in world opinion.

Mr. Johnson is anything but oblivious to opinion at home and abroad, despite his willingness to act forcefully. Henry Cabot Lodge is on his second foreign tour to drum up support for the United States in Vietnam and three envoys—Ambassador at Large W. Averell Harriman, Ambassador Ralph A. Dungan and Teodoro Moscoso, a former State Department official—are touring Latin-American capitals to explain the Dominican action.

At home, Mr. Johnson has gone to great lengths to quell and counter Congressional criticism—most of it from his own party—on Vietnam. More than almost any other President, he has taken to television to explain himself and his policies.

Briefings for Reporters

Mr. Johnson and his aides have also spent long hours discussing these and other situations with reporters. One afternoon 10 days ago, the Presi-

dent gave long separate interviews to four reporters.

This suggests Mr. Johnson's acute sensitivity to the domestic political effects of foreign policy; whether it also suggests domestic political motivations for action abroad is an open question.

The Johnson foreign policy sometimes seems ad hoc and primarily a response to developing events—as in the Dominican Republic. But this is not always true; bombing targets in North Vietnam were pinpointed as long ago as October but the planes were not sent for months, until the American elections were past, and until governmental instability in South Vietnam threatened to bring a total collapse of the effort there. Great deliberation went into the decision to bomb; yet Mr. Johnson's offer of "unconditional discussions" did not go into his recent Baltimore speech until its late drafts.

One difficulty in interpreting Mr. Johnson's approach to foreign policy lies in the way his actions have evolved from one explanation to another. Last fall, he talked only of "prudence and restraint" in Vietnam; now he has gone as far in his tactics as Barry Goldwater advocated although he has not yet turned the war over to the generals, as Mr. Goldwater said he would.

Evolution of His Moves

When the bombings began, it was as a specific response to specific provocations; later bombing became a tactic to attempt to halt North Vietnamese infiltration and aggression.

Last week, marines were dispatched to the Dominican Republic to protect United States citizens, but no pledge was given to pull them out when that objective was accomplished. By Sunday night, Mr. Johnson was saying that the troops were there to prevent a Communist take-over—as was already obvious.

All this could be due to no more than the rapidly changing circumstances of the 20th century. Or it could represent initial confusion gradually developing into reasoned policies. It could also be a characteristically Johnsonian effort to mask his motives and maintain his flexibility until his position is established. Politicians as shrewd as Lyndon B. Johnson usually move in mysterious ways their wonders to perform.