

Nixon Can Undo Aides' Harm

By Drew Pearson

PRESIDENT NIXON has an opportunity in Paris this weekend to undo what some of his aides did, with or without his approval, when they conspired with the South Vietnamese to delay the peace talks on the eve of last November's election out of fear that fruitful peace talks might elect Hubert Humphrey.

It will be recalled that President Johnson announced an end of all American bombing on Oct. 31 because of North Vietnamese troop withdrawals and because Hanoi had agreed that the South Vietnamese government could participate in the Paris talks. After months of deadlock, the President disclosed that the Paris talks had "entered a new and very much more hopeful phase."

This was five days before the Presidential election, and the announcement gave a boost to Hubert Humphrey's chance of victory. Then President Nguyen Van Thieu of South Vietnam suddenly backed away from the conference table.

Thieu announced to the South Vietnamese National Assembly on Nov. 2 that South Vietnam would not attend the Paris talks and characterized them as "just another trick toward a coalition government with the Communists."

To the average American, it looked as if President Johnson had jumped the gun in order to help Vice President Humphrey. With many voters the peace announcement backfired. But it has now been confirmed that Ambassador Bunker had a definite

commitment from President Thieu to participate in the Paris talks.

Why, therefore, did Thieu suddenly back off? Because Republicans pulled backstage wires to postpone the peace talks.

MOST influential with the South Vietnamese was the charming and vivacious Mme. Anna Chennault, widow of Gen. Claire Chennault, commander of the Flying Tigers in Asia during World War II. Mme. Chennault is Chinese, a close friend of Mme. Chiang Kai-shek in Formosa, and during the election campaign served as a co-chairman of the Women for Nixon-Agnew Committee.

Working through her friends in both South Vietnam and Taiwan, Mme. Chennault urged that the Paris peace talks be stalled. She argued that the South Vietnamese government would get a better deal from Nixon since he, a well-known hawk, had long been sympathetic to their cause. She also argued that if Nixon were elected, South Vietnam's old friend, Henry Cabot Lodge, former U.S. Ambassador in Saigon, would probably replace tough negotiator Averell Harriman in Paris.

It was not until after Nixon was elected that President Thieu finally changed his mind. Political observers believe that, since the Nixon-Humphrey election was one of the closest in history, it may well have been the deliberate delay of South Vietnam, prodded by Nixon friends in Washington, which tipped the balance on election day.

Perhaps more important, the above illustrates the fact that Nixon, because the South Vietnamese consider him their friend, now has more diplomatic leverage than the Johnson Administration to bring peace to this beleaguered part of the world.

Bolivian Ingratitude

MUCH OF Latin America is now lining up against the United States in the rapidly approaching showdown with the Peruvian military dictatorship.

The support of the Brazilian military for Peru is not surprising. Despite the fact that Brazilian coffee sales to the United States constitute the backbone of the Brazilian economy, the Brazilian generals have called a meeting of Latin American representatives to be held in Chile, shortly after the April 9 U. S. deadline with Peru, to consider economic retaliation against the United States.

Much more surprising was the recent statement by President Rene Barrientos of Bolivia lining up behind the Peruvian military.

BARRIENTOS, of course, is a military man and originally came into office by a military revolt. He was re-elected in free and open elections, however, and subsequently has made two trips to the United States.

In addition, the United States sent special military support to Bolivia when the country was worried over the guerrilla operations of the late Che Guevara. And for over a decade, American foreign aid balanced the Boliv-

ian budget. The country existed financially only because of generous American financial support.

Despite this, President Barrientos lined up Bolivia behind Peru in its feud with the United States.

"Peru can be sure," he said, "that we are observing her problems with the greatest sympathy and solidarity, just as we can expect support in our dramatic fight."

Observers here are mystified as to what Barrientos means by "our dramatic fight" since he has maintained cordial relations with the only important American company operating in Bolivia, namely Gulf Oil. As far as is known, neither the United States nor any U.S. company has any argument with Bolivia.

PRESIDENT Barrientos's voluntary statement probably means that he wants Peruvian help against Chile, with which Bolivia does not have diplomatic relations at the moment. Bolivia has been persistently seeking an outlet on the Pacific Ocean, but this will have to come about through the cooperation of Chile as well as Peru.

The fact that President Barrientos should voluntarily issue his statement critical of the United States in the present controversy is one indication of how Latin American sentiment is now lining up. The heads of Latin American governments will be under pressure from their own people to take similar public positions, even though such countries as Venezuela and Colombia are privately sympathetic.

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