

Johnson Hurt by His Snap Decisions

By Drew Pearson

Despite his personal ego, President Johnson is surprisingly realistic most of the time about his limitations in the field of foreign affairs.

"I'm learnin', George, I'm learnin'," he once told Under Secretary of State George Ball. "The only question is whether the world can wait until I learn enough."



Pearson

He knows that he assumed the Presidency woefully unprepared regarding foreign affairs. All his experience in the Congress was with the military. He had been both a member of the House Naval Affairs Committee and a young naval officer during World War II. He had been a member of the Senate Armed Services Committee, chairman of the Senate Preparedness Committee, of the Space Committee, and a member of the Appropriations Subcommittee for the Armed Services.

Most of his contacts on Capitol Hill were with the generals and the admirals sent up to sell him on various military programs. He had no important contacts with the State Department. He even once led the Senate drive to drastically curtail one of the

most important branches of foreign policy — the U.S. Information Agency — which he now champions.

Considering this lack of foreign affairs background, President Johnson has done pretty well. During his first year in office he made more progress in Soviet-American understanding than did President Kennedy in three years. He adroitly sidetracked the multilateral nuclear force which was churning up our NATO allies. He refused to tangle publicly with de Gaulle. He advised the Germans to allay Russian suspicions, advice which they followed.

But every so often, the President's old habit of siding with the generals, and his latent Texas instinct for shooting from the hip got the better of him and he sank the Nation in trouble.

Snap Judgments

This was what happened in the Dominican Republic where in 30 minutes he made up his mind to undo our quarter-century-old policy of non-intervention. That 30-minute snap decision to land the Marines cost around \$110,000,000 and alienated our best Latin-American friends. Despite elections they are still suspicious.

The President also made a snap decision at about 2 a.m., Feb. 7, 1965, to begin a policy of bombing North Vietnam. The generals had been urging this for some time, and the President finally accepted

their advice at a time of the night when few men's judgment is clearest. It was purely a military decision.

What the generals either did not know or did not properly evaluate was that Premier Kosygin, one of the new leaders of the Soviet, had arrived in Hanoi only that day, and en route had urged the Chinese to help bring the North Vietnamese to a peace conference. This is what we have long wanted, but Johnson snatched Kosygin with a rain of bombs 24 hours after he proposed it.

Lyndon's latest decision to escalate around Hanoi and Haiphong was made not on the spur of the moment but after several weeks of waiting for the Buddhist riots to subside, and it was made in large part because the Joint Chiefs of Staff were so frustrated and unhappy that Johnson felt he must do something to restore their morale.

Again it was purely a military decision. The generals who recommended it knew little of the efforts American diplomats have made to thaw the freeze with China. They knew nothing of the political situation confronting Prime Minister Harold Wilson of England, our staunchest ally.

And they do not understand the all-important fact that the people of South Vietnam can never be helped constructively until they have a government which represents

them, not a regime which represents the United States.

What the generals knew was that they were not winning. They had promised the President three years ago that they would win in one year.

The last time President Johnson acted on their advice on a major matter—the bombing of North Vietnam on Feb. 7, 1965 — the excuse was to prevent troops and supplies from infiltrating South. One year later, the Secretary of Defense says that the flow of men and supplies has increased 150 and 120 per cent respectively.

LBJ Undercuts LBJ

If the President is going to take the advice of military men, what he needs is military men around him who have fought in the Far East before — Gen. Omar Bradley, Gen. Matt Ridgway, Gen. Joe Collins — who came through the agonies of Korea and know what it's like to face endless waves of Orientals.

The tragedy is that the President is rapidly painting himself into a position where the great things he has accomplished on the domestic front will be both forgotten and undermined.

He is also painting himself into a position where the American people will conclude that the only way they can get out of this war is to elect a new President with new policies, and do it as quickly as possible—in 1968.

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