

LBJ and Ike Discussed A-Bomb Views

By Drew Pearson

President Johnson held two confidential talks before he left Washington which will probably influence the course of events at the Manila Summit Conference opening today.

One was a telephone conversation with former President Eisenhower, who from Gettysburg wished LBJ good luck



Pearson

on his trip. Mr. Johnson had called Mr. Eisenhower to say goodby and Ike in turn spent some time explaining that his recent statement suggesting the use of atomic weapons to end the Vietnam war had been misunderstood.

All he had meant to say, Ike told LBJ, was that the United States should never foreclose the use of nuclear weapons. He recalled to the President that they had agreed in previous discussions that the United States should hold the nuclear threat over Red China as a deterrent to keep her from throwing her massive manpower into Vietnam. And the former President assured the President that he had only intended by his recent statement to support that policy.

Since the President has been under some pressure from Republicans to use atomic

weapons to end the war in a hurry, Mr. Eisenhower's statement will tend to influence him toward a moderate policy at Manila.

The second talk, with Vice President Humphrey and Ambassador Arthur Goldberg, should be even more influential in veering Mr. Johnson toward a moderate course in Manila.

Both men urged the President not to disrupt the thaw between the United States and Russia by escalating the Vietnam war. They had in mind that the President had just made a most important speech outlining the reduction of trade barriers, the extension of credits to European Communist nations, and the starting of the New York-Moscow airline. And they reminded LBJ that the last period of better relations between the USA-USSR was spoiled when he gave the order to bomb North Vietnam.

Red Russian Faces

The first bombs fell one day after Premier Alexei Kosygin had arrived in Hanoi; and when the United States later asked Russia to help end the Vietnam war, the Russians reminded us that this was exactly what Kosygin was trying to do but we bombed North Vietnam. This had made Kosygin look so foolish, the Russians said, that he could no longer advocate a Vietnam truce.

In view of all this, Humphrey and Goldberg advised the President that this would be exactly the wrong moment to step up the war. They knew, of course, that Premier Ky of South Vietnam and Premier Thanom of Thailand were going to urge escalation. If we follow their advice, the Russians once again would interpret this as pulling the peace rug right out from under them as Mr. Johnson had pleaded with Foreign Minister Gromyko to use his good offices with North Vietnam for peace.

Russian Peace Overtures

What Vice President Humphrey and Ambassador Goldberg were referring to was a significant piece of history largely revealed by the Chinese in a series of documents made public in order to prove their contention that Russia was the "stooge of the imperialist Americans."

The Chinese documents show that in January, 1965, the Soviet government had passed two requests on behalf of the United States to North Vietnam: First, that North Vietnam stop sending weapons to the Vietcong; second, that Vietcong be ordered to stop attacking South Vietnamese cities.

On Feb. 4, Premier Kosygin, only in office three months, went to Peking as a peace emissary. According to the Chinese official report: Kosygin stressed the need to help

the United States 'find a way out' of Vietnam."

The Chinese were cool; so Kosygin proceeded on to Hanoi, arriving there on Feb. 6. One day later President Johnson ordered the first bombing of North Vietnam. The Russians were furious.

Persevering Peace Envoy

According to the Chinese documents, however, Kosygin, despite this embarrassment, did persevere in trying to end the hostilities between North and South Vietnam.

"On Feb. 16, 1965," continues the Chinese report, "the day after Kosygin's return to Moscow, the Soviets put before North Vietnam and China a proposal to convene a new international conference on Indochina."

These efforts were rebuffed by Red China and North Vietnam, and ever since that time the Russians have made it clear to the State Department that they are loath to be put in the position of being criticized by the Chinese for being once again "stooges for the imperialist Americans."

President Johnson has received no definite word as a result of his talks with Foreign Minister Gromyko two weeks ago as to whether the Russians will make another peace try. But there have been a few private hints from the Kremlin that Soviet reaction is favorable.