

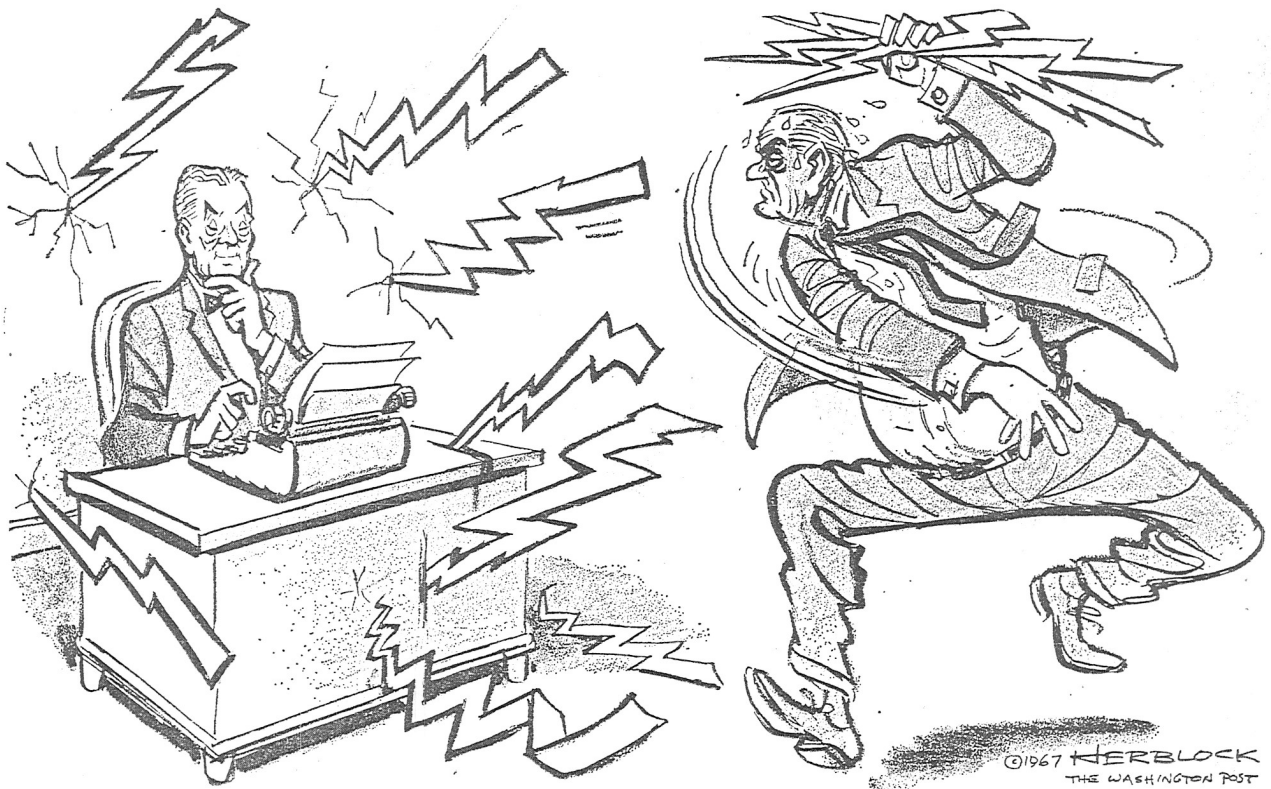
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Out

SECTION C

SUNDAY, 1

# On the Problems



# of Vietnam Policy

## *The War on Lippmann*

By *Herblock*

WITH ALL the war correspondence that appears these days, there has been remarkably little coverage of the conflict which seems to have become the major preoccupation of the White House. I refer, of course, not to "The War in Vietnam, or The Other War of "pacification," but The Other Other War, which is to say The War on Walter Lippmann. In this conflict, the White House lights seem to be burning late, even if not brightly.

The W. on W.L. apparently began in bitter but limited actions involving presidential contacts with small groups. An indirect response came from Mr. Lippmann in the course of an interview on his announced departure for New York, when he said, in answer to a question about his relations with the

President, that "he misled me." This restrained reply, coming from one as high-caliber and low-key as Mr. L., had the force of a blast from almost anyone else.

The War on Walter Lippmann escalated sharply at a White House dinner for the President of Turkey. Here, President Johnson, in an unusual toast which must have sounded more like a roast, referred deprecatingly to 1947 Lippman columns in a scarcely veiled reference to "a commentator who is still with us." Needless to say, he was not referring to a commentator who was with the President at dinner or in spirit.

Mr. Lippmann replied with a column in which he took cognizance of the presidential toast, and reprinted a 1947 column to refute the President's allusions to Lippman policy of that period.

After the state dinner heavy artillery, the White House next threw in a small-bore weapon named John Roche, who shot forth a letter-to-the-editor which appeared in The Washington Post. Mr. Roche was here identified as a "Special Consultant to the President," apparently being a special consultant on the strategy of The War on Walter Lippmann. He professed to be surprised that Mr. L. should think himself the target of the presidential remarks, but quickly added that the Lippmann record bore out the validity of the attack.

He then made the cute suggestion that if Mr. Lippmann "runs out of thoughts on 'credibility,' he might re-run some of his (old columns) for us." This was probably a tactical error, since it reopened an area of White

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# *Herblock's Dispatch From The War on Lippman*

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House weakness which Mr. Lippmann had touched on but lightly.

The term "credibility gap" apparently originated in a column of that title by Murrey Marder which appeared in The Washington Post on Dec. 5, 1965. And subsequently so many more credibility gap examples have been cited that the White House consultants needn't worry about anyone running out of thoughts on this subject.

Mr. Lippmann did not bother with the "special consultant"; and the next development to come to this correspondent's attention was a minor one which occurred at a large press dinner. Here, another White House staff member delivered a really witty speech which nonetheless included a switch on a current button slogan, "God is not dead; he is alive and in the White House." Said this White House aide: "God is not dead; he is alive and appears in The Washington Post twice a week."

But the President is not one to leave important matters to less energetic subordinates or to leave alone a bad situation if he can find a way to make it worse.

At another press dinner shortly afterward, he turned up suddenly and interrupted the entertainment to speak. This he did with such unaccustomed humor that he overcame the resentment at this latest last-minute-surprise-appearance - with-completely-prepared-text-in-hand. He even set his listeners to wondering who was responsible for this felicitous new-style speech. But in the midst of all his light and bright sallies, he could not refrain from laying another little bomb. He referred to a columnist about to leave Washington for New York as "a political commenta-

tor of yesteryear"—words of lead that bore the unmistakable LBJ brand.

If Mr. Lippmann were a less modest man, the attention lavished on him by this Chief of State would be enough to turn his head. And if he and Mr. Johnson had lived in the days of Thomas More and Henry VIII, he would have lost his head completely.

Those who are baffled by the White House concentration on Mr. L. do not understand war. Throughout the current conflict in Vietnam, the Administration has continually referred to "the other side" in the way advertisers have referred to Brand X. This is a vague term which gives the fullest scope to vague thinking, so that at any time "the other side" can be interpreted as the Vietcong, or as troops from North Vietnam, or as Peking, Moscow, Budapest, Bucharest or Belgrade, or as U.S. allies trading with Communist China.

But things are now coming into better focus. It has become an Administration article of faith that the only thing keeping the war going is Hanoi's recognition of the fact that there is dissent in the United States. And who is the most widely read and respected dissenter? Of course!

So now we know what is meant by "the other side." It is not Kosygin or Mao Tse-tung or Ho Chi Minh. It is Walter Lippmann. Viewed in this light, it can be seen that the President is not being as petty and foolish as he might seem. He is engaged here in Grand Strategy.

It would be hazardous to predict the future of The War on Walter Lippmann. But on past performance, we can guess that the President, undaunted by the possibility of a conflict widened to bring in other members of the press, will push on at all costs.