

The Overseas Agnew

Vice President Proves That He Can Be As Quiet Abroad as He Is Vocal at Home

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MADRID, July 18—Vice President Agnew made the biggest news of his worldwide trip when he criticized Senate doves during a briefing in Singapore, attacked The New York Times and other news media while in Ethiopia and excoriated some American black leaders during the plane trip to Madrid. This sequence says much about the style and substance of his trip and throws into sharp relief his far quieter role as a diplomat. He has made little news or noise as President Nixon's roving envoy, and if he has proved anything it is that he can remain as inconspicuous abroad as he is conspicuous at home.

That seems to be the way he planned his trip, which is now three weeks old—or perhaps the way the White House and the State Department planned it for him.

Mr. Agnew perceived early on that the essence of his duty was to listen to his hosts and

to offer 10 of the United States' most conservative and anxious allies reassurance that whatever they had been reading in the newspapers about neo-isolationist sentiment among Americans, it was not shared by President Nixon, and, furthermore, that their interests would not be sacrificed in the Administration's efforts to reach new relationships in Vietnam and with the Soviet Union and China.

That, essentially, was the soothing message he took to South Korea, Singapore, Kenya, the Congo (Kinshasa) and Spain. In Kuwait and in Saudi Arabia the emphasis was naturally on the Middle Eastern crisis, with Mr. Agnew patiently explaining that despite the President's desire for a solution there were limits to which he could push Israel into a settlement.

In those two countries, according to Mr. Agnew's testimony to the reporters traveling with him, he heard their leaders express fears that the publication of the Pentagon Papers and the increasingly dovish sentiment in Congress had threatened the standing of the United States as a world power.

As far as could be determined Mr. Agnew engaged in no tough negotiating, struck no new bargains and made no new promises. It was not—at least in substantive terms—what normally passes for a "major" diplomatic mission, full of new initiatives.

The Vice President tailored his style accordingly. He has made few public statements—although his staff dutifully churns out arrival and departure statements for each stop, he has actually delivered only a few of them—limiting himself to gracious and generous little toasts at the interminable round of receptions, lunches and dinners that occupied many of his days and forced him, perhaps out of a sense of self-preservation, to the golf courses and tennis courts for his exercise.

The Vice President's chief aides have remained as hermit-like as their boss. Tight security has diminished even further the publicity that might have accrued. Mr. Agnew, it seems, is not trying to make



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AT MADRID'S ZARZUELA PALACE: Vice President Agnew with Prince Juan Carlos de Borbón yesterday.

political capital of this trip and is doing his best to be a deferential diplomat.

He has turned out to be rather good at it, and the host Governments have seemed delighted by his presence and by what he has said. It should be noted—and was, by most observers on the trip—that Mr. Agnew's reputation as a conservative could not have hurt him with the stern and even authoritarian Governments on his itinerary and that his views on the newspapers and the Senate doves were certain to touch responsive chords.

The Vice President's near-anonymity on the road and the modest nature of his mission have fueled new speculation about whether he will appear as Mr. Nixon's running mate in 1972.

Plainly, Henry A. Kissinger's

mission to Peking to arrange for a visit by the President made Mr. Agnew's trip seem almost irrelevant by comparison. Meanwhile, Secretary of Defense Melvin R. Laird's journey to South Korea carried considerably greater substantive importance than any of Mr. Agnew's stops.

Such speculation may well be premature. As Mr. Nixon himself discovered many years ago, it is one of a Vice President's duties to perform routine and occasionally secondary chores that seem too remote for Presidential attention. And Mr. Agnew's attack on black leaders yesterday on the plane suggests that he is aware that he maintains strong ties to a like-minded constituency whose loyal members might make it difficult for Mr. Nixon to dislodge him even if he wished to.