

Nixon and the Protests

Views Differ on How the Administration Reacts to Uproar Over Cambodia Move

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WASHINGTON, May 27—A month has passed since President Nixon ordered American troops into Cambodia and there are now three quite different views here about how his Administration is reacting to the turmoil that ensued.

The first of these finds the President and many of his aides believing that the worst is over: The invasion itself will soon be shown to have been a military success and

an imaginative stroke to hasten the end of the war; the slaying of students at Kent State and Jackson and the precipitous slide of the stock market will come to be recognized as unfortunate but unrelated phenomena that temporarily compounded the public's sense of crisis; and some energetic public relations both for the President and against his detractors will gradually restore his standing with a still loyal if no longer so silent majority.

Second View: Off Stride

The second and quite contrary view is that the President and his closest advisers have been thrown off their stride and forced to re-examine everything from their work habits to their basic political calculations.

According to this view, they are now persuaded that the country is much more deeply divided and therefore more fragile than they imagined; that the public is frightened, rent by doubts and resentments and politically fickle and volatile; and that the President must develop a much more soothing style that gives the most disaffected parts of the community—and of his Administration—a feeling of access to him and to the decision-making process.

The third and most personalized view of the President's crisis is that Mr. Nixon feels himself and his office challenged and even threatened by a breakdown in authority and political consensus and that after a period of conciliation he will feel compelled to organize a counterattack upon all those in the Congress, on the campus, in the streets and around the world who he thinks are undermining the power and prerogatives of the United States and its leader.

economic news. It reckons that momentum alone will then result in a general sense of psychic recovery while the energies of conflict are drawn off by this fall's Congressional election campaign.

But the view that something deeper is amiss has also been actively pressed upon the President, including the calculation that Republican chances in the autumn might be seriously affected if the election turns into a referendum on his leadership.

He has been urged to reach out more toward college communities and blacks and other alienated groups—and those most receptive to their complaints inside the Government—not just to ride out the current crisis but to try to heal the nation's basic social divisions.

Conversely, he has also been urged to restrain the rhetoric by which he and Vice President Agnew and others have dealt with foreign and domestic adversaries, not so much to appease the protesters as to still the hatreds that are thought to be welling up on all sides.

Gestures Made

Mr. Nixon has made many gestures in this direction in the last few weeks but his advisers are not yet sure how he will plot his long-term strategy.

It is in calculating the long term that many observers in and out of government here are analyzing the President in the most personal, almost psychological manner, much as they used to in the days when Lyndon B. Johnson occupied the Oval Office.

Many contend, for instance, that Mr. Nixon's sense of the present crisis date not to the Cambodian venture at all but to the Senate's rejection, three weeks earlier in April, of the Supreme Court nomination of Judge G. Harrold Carswell.

In his angry reaction to what he took to be a personal affront, Mr. Nixon abandoned his first-year manner of respectful argument with his critics and denounced a majority of Senators as hypocrites and malicious character assassins.

A Widespread Suspicion

There is a widespread suspicion here that Mr. Nixon's decision to ignore Congress on Cambodia, and to discount the expected opposition of liberals generally, was directly related to his bitterness over the Carswell affair. And there are some indications that he sees the current efforts in the Senate to limit his war-making powers as the continuation of a political, even spiteful and unconstitutional campaign to strip him and the Presidency of essential powers and prerogatives.

If that remains his perception some observers here say, then the President will not be content to ride out the crisis or to appease the sentiments of his opposition. His habit, as observed by some members of his Cabinet, is to attack when attacked, and they believe he will use success in Cambodia or any other favorable turn in the news to wage a vigorous campaign of vindication and retribution against those who crossed him when he felt down and low.

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All 3 Called True

When you ask the most alert and informed officials here which of these three views best describes the situation at the moment, the answer, invariably, is "all three."

In support of the worst-is-over thesis, officials now think they can easily prove military gains in Cambodia. The White House publicity machine has been put to work on the problem amid evidence that Mr. Nixon would like to cap the effort by announcing a success of such proportions that he can withdraw troops even sooner than expected from Cambodia and even faster than planned from Vietnam itself.

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