

Ball Says Johnson Encouraged Opposition to Vietnam Policy

6-17-71
NYT

Special to The New York Times

MADRID, June 16 — Former Under Secretary of State George W. Ball said today that his opposition, in the mid-1960's, to the increasing United States military commitment in Vietnam had been welcomed and encouraged by then President Lyndon B. Johnson.

Mr. Ball was commenting on the publication in The New York Times of material from a secret Pentagon study concerning official decisions made at the time.

Reached by telephone in Salamanca, Mr. Ball, who is on a vacation tour through Spain, said he had not had an opportunity to do more than glance at an abbreviated version of the first of the three installments of the series of articles published so far.

Specifically, he said, he had not yet read the parts of the study referring to his own views and actions at the time.

He refrained from commenting on the dispute between the Nixon Administration and The New York Times over the legality and propriety of publishing the series. "In principle I am in favor of more disclosure, but in the first place I have not read the articles, and in the second place I am reluctant to speak on an issue that is now before the court," he said.

Mr. Ball recounted the gist of his arguments against escalation. He said he had sent the President his first long memo-

randum on the subject in September, 1964 "and a whole series of them at the beginning of 1965 and early in the year.

"I had special views on the subject," he said. "The view I consistently expressed was that Vietnam was a very poor place to commit American power, both from the political point of view and from the physical point of view, because of the terrain.

"I thought we should cut our losses before the point came where we could only get out with great breakage."

Mr. Ball stressed that during this period of dissent his relations, both with President Johnson and with the Administration "hawks," were cordial.

"The point I want to emphasize is that the President, rather than resenting my arguments, was grateful," he said. "He wanted me to speak my mind and thanked me a number of times for my disagreeing with him."

Mr. Ball said he was "reluctant to pass judgment" on one of the main issues raised by the study: indications that while the Johnson Administration was fighting an election campaign on a platform defending limited involvement, it was simultaneously making plans to increase that involvement radically.

"It was in considerably different circumstances than we have today," Mr. Ball said. "All the pressures were for escalation."

tion."