

Pressure on President

Some Aides Call for Re-examination After Outcry Over Cambodia and Kent

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Special to The New York Times

MAY 13 1970

WASHINGTON, May 12—The Nixon Administration has now reached a critical period of its tenure as it tries to pull the nation, and itself, back together again after a momentous fortnight of strain and tumult. In the wake of the outcry over Cambodia and Kent, there is evident throughout the top of the Government a strong desire to unite in defense of the Presidency, to guard its powers against dismemberment in Congress and to guard its authority against discredit abroad. But there are also signs of a new battle for the ear and favor of the President, a battle that may reopen many of the year-old arguments here about the direction of Government, about youth and blacks and civil liberties and economic priorities.

Some officials around the White House are said to have suggested that a little good public relations will repair whatever damage has been done among the voters, that the college demonstrators have dispersed and directed their energies elsewhere and that Mr. Nixon's basic policies and politics will soon be vindicated.

But many others, including prominent Cabinet members, are mounting an argument that Mr. Nixon needs a broader base of support to govern than he needs to win elections, that he must regain the respect of alienated citizens even if he cannot gain their votes and that he must re-examine his methods to attain that respect.

How Nixon Sees It

There is no reliable indication of how Mr. Nixon himself regards the situation. He knows he has aroused the opposition to the war in what he deems damaging proportions. He knows he has awakened bitter quarrels and rivalries among his aides and senior officials. He knows that the effort to demonstrate the nation's will and strength has, at least temporarily, only advertised its divisions and weaknesses. That is why he has lost a great deal of sleep in recent days and sought all kinds of fresh advice from educators, young people and labor leaders, outside as well as inside the White House.

But those who have seen him in the last 72 hours say they cannot yet determine the full extent of his introspection. He has reaffirmed his confidence in the decision to "clean out" the Cambodian sanctuaries and is working hard to demonstrate its value. He insists that he has given the country no cause to question his candor on Vietnam or other issues and resents the challenges to his credibility and comparisons to his predecessor, Lyndon B. Johnson. And he has strongly disclaimed responsibility for the nation's unrest, contending that the malaise of many citizens would be just as great if there were no war or Nixon Administration.

Nonetheless, Mr. Nixon is

said to be listening keenly when advisers, such as Henry A. Kissinger, bemoan the condition of the country and worry about the nation's capacity to withstand serious challenge from the Soviet Union, as in the Middle East. He is said to be listening closely also to advisers such as Daniel Patrick Moynihan as they suggest that the alienation of youth is not merely a matter of petty petulance but a profoundly different perception of the world by different generations.

To reassert the authority of the Presidency in foreign affairs, even those officials who questioned the wisdom of the Cambodia decision are trying to help Mr. Nixon prevent the Senate from circumscribing his powers as Commander in Chief. They argue that no President in the nuclear age can afford to have his hands tied against military action and that potential enemies must not be tempted by arbitrary restraints.

But apparently they also argue, as Secretary of State William P. Rogers did before the Cambodian decision, that Mr. Nixon cannot afford to rupture his standing with the Congress and that the needed authority abroad must be seen to rest on authority at home.

The Republican Philosophy

And it is on this point of domestic appeal and authority that Mr. Nixon faces the most persistent new pressure from advisers who will not be satisfied with easier access to him and his staff.

Like its predecessors in other Administrations, Mr. Nixon's Cabinet ceased long ago to function as a team. It does not meet often and cannot act as a body, despite the President's early claims to the contrary. What has troubled Robert H. Finch, the Secretary of Health, Education and Welfare; George Romney, the Secretary of Housing and Urban Development; and Walter J. Hickel, the Secretary of the Interior, among others, is not their diminishing role as individuals but their inability to resist the general trend of policy away from the liberal end of the Republican philosophy toward the more conservative.

In the choice of political tactics, economic priorities, approaches to Negroes and youth and other matters, these officials and others have resented what they took to be the President's increasing reliance on Attorney General John N. Mitchell, Vice President Agnew and a few conservative White House aides and their own progressive exclusion from crucial policy debates.

Their hope now is that the events of the last two weeks may have caused the President to reconsider his methods of work, and perhaps even some of his political calculations about the mood of the country. They think they can at least re-establish some balance and they are trying to seize the moment of their leader's need.