

Behind Nixon's Policy on War: Fear Not of the Left

By ROBERT B. SEMPLE Jr.
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SAN CLEMENTE, Calif., July 5—As President Nixon pointed out on television the other night, only history can judge the effectiveness of what he has done in Cambodia.

But lodged in the public utterances of the President and the private analyses of his senior associates over the last 10 days, hidden among the claims of success for the Cambodia operation and grave warnings about

dangers in the Middle East, was an occasional revelatory glimpse of the fundamental assumptions, fears and hopes that govern much of what Mr. Nixon and his colleagues do.

It has long been thought, for example, that not only Mr. Nixon but also Henry A. Kissinger, his national security adviser, as well as the rest of his policy-making team, believe to a man that the real danger in the United States will arise not from the students of the left who wish to abandon the war at any cost but from the people of the right and even the center who will be humiliated and then angry if he does what the students want him to do.

Briefing Statements Quoted

Forty news executives were given a high-level private briefing on June 26. Present were Mr. Kissinger, William H. Sullivan, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State, and Lieut. Gen. John W. Vogt Jr., none of whom, under the rules governing such occasions, can be identified publicly with the words they used. Following is a passage from the briefing:

Can we abdicate our best judgment of where we ought to go in order to prevent demonstrations by a minority, a minority which every so often refuses to engage in any dialogue, and which does not have a program, but only profound emotion.

What we have to attempt to do, really, all of us, is to preserve some vestige of authority in this country, if we are ever going to move with confidence and competence toward a better future. What we have to do in Vietnam inevitably has some elements of ambiguity.

We have to convince the American people that we will pull out our troops, but we have to convince Hanoi that the withdrawal is not independent of their actions, so that they have an incentive to negotiate. We have to do many things which cannot be done unless the intermediary leadership in this country will at least support the proposition that there is only one man who can bring peace in Vietnam.

If confidence in him and in all institutions is systematically destroyed, we will turn into a group that has nothing left but a physical test of strength, and the only outcome of this is Caesarism.

The very people who shout Power to the People are not going to be the people who will take over this country if it turns into a test of strength. Upper middle-class college kids will not take this country over. Some more primitive and elemental forces will do that if it happens. This is why we have spent an enormous amount of time in the White House in recent months talking to the college students.

Domino Theory Invoked

Not all of the revelations were private. Because the "domino theory" is so closely associated in the public mind

with the Johnson administration, Mr. Nixon has generally avoided invoking it to explain why he is holding out for a settlement in Vietnam. But on television last Wednesday the theory came out as one of his guiding propositions. When one of the questioners noted that some people could not seriously believe that other non-Communist nations would really collapse if South Vietnam fell, the President got off one of those colloquial one-liners heard often in private but rarely in public:

"They haven't talked to the dominoes."

but of the Right

Still, in the private briefings, there was much evidence that Mr. Nixon and his high command really detest this war, not only for itself but because it holds them to the foreign policy of the past and prevents them from moving to a new position.

Kennedy's Words Recalled

At one point in the briefing for news executives, one of the senior officials present invited his listeners to read President Kennedy's 1961 inaugural address, to study Mr. Kennedy's pledge to fight any foe wherever he may be, and then to reflect on how the tragedy in Vietnam had so tired the American public that no future President could make such a pledge or, if he made it, fulfill it.

In a very profound sense, [the official went on] what this Administration has had to do is preside over the beginning of a new phase of American policy at the precise moment when it has had to liquidate the most outstanding vestige of the previous phase of American policy—because, after all, part of the reason why we got into this war in Vietnam was the theory that aggression, wherever it occurred, was our job, that we had been able to shut off the conventional aggression and nuclear aggression and now we had to shut off guerrilla wars.

This is what has made the task of this Administration complex, and as in all revolutions or transitional phases, it is very difficult to draw neat dividing lines. The past continues to exist while you are trying to shape the future.

'Orchestration' Charged

Somewhere between the hopes of this senior official for a more modest foreign policy and the President's instincts to defend the world against the Communist enemy lies Richard Nixon's own transitional-foreign policy.

The White House disputes the charge, made by some observers, that last week's news events were "orchestrated." But the hand of Herbert G. Klein, the Administration's Director of Communications, could be seen nearly everywhere. Mr. Klein set up the high-level briefing for news executives, which almost backfired because a number of prominent newspapers were excluded. But in the end, especially when the transcript became generally available on Thursday, it turned out to be an exceptionally useful device for reinforcing what the President said on television the night before about Vietnam and about his alarm over the Soviet presence in the Middle East, keeping both stories on the front pages one more day.

Mr. Klein played a secondary role, however, in the Wednesday night television show, which was largely the creation of the White House press secretary, Ronald L. Ziegler, and H. R. Haldeman, the President's chief of staff, who had been turning over the idea of a live, informal conversation with the President for many months and acted on it three weeks ago.

They had asked Walter Cronkite to represent the Columbia Broadcasting System, but he

was on vacation and Eric Sevareid came instead. The other participants were John Chancellor of the National Broadcasting Company and Howard K. Smith of the American Broadcasting Company. Mr. Smith's presence added a note of irony. There are many who trace Mr. Nixon's political comeback to Mr. Smith's acid television show in 1962, "The Obituary of Richard M. Nixon," which provoked widespread public sympathy for Mr. Nixon and revived his political hopes. Privately, the Nixon staff

will admit to mixed feelings about Wednesday night's show. The President had prepared, perhaps even overprepared, by going to Los Angeles the day before the show to pore over briefing papers furnished by Mr. Kissinger's staff, and he dawdled unnecessarily on some questions for which a brisk answer might have sufficed.

But out in Middle America, they feel, the President struck responsive chords, if only because he displayed enough self-assurance to face three members of what Vice President

Agnew has called the broadcasting elite in an unrehearsed situation. The President opened the show by announcing the appointment of David K. E. Bruce as chief United States representative to the Paris peace talks.

The rest was anticlimactic: The President's domestic advisers gave a briefing Friday that was, for a change, on the record. And yesterday Mr. Bruce arrived to be photographed and get his instructions for the negotiations in Paris.

Then Mr. Bruce departed, and the nine-day exercise was over.