

Agnew the Diplomat

Administration Aides Pleased by Results Of Asian Trip and by His Performance

By ROBERT B. SEMPLE Jr. AUG 31 1970

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SAN CLEMENTE, Calif., Aug. 30—Top Administration officials here at the Presidential compound are, of course, happy with the good news Vice President Agnew is apparently bringing home from his Asian tour.

They are equally pleased by the Vice President himself. The only diplomatic purpose of Mr. Agnew's mission, authoritative sources confirm, was to explain the Nixon doctrine, to tell four Asian allies that Mr. Nixon meant business when he announced last year his intention to reduce America's combat presence in Asia, and at the same time to reassure them that antiwar sentiment at home would not reduce the President's determination or ability to provide other forms of aid as compensation.

It was, in short, a modest if delicate mission to explain, clarify, reassure and listen—but not, officials here insist, to do any serious negotiating. An impression that Mr. Agnew's mission was to play the role of negotiator, and convey new initiatives from the President is traceable to two events. Nixon's Remarks Magnified

One was Mr. Nixon's remarks when he gave Mr. Agnew a formal send-off from San Clemente last weekend. He said he had asked Mr. Agnew to carry to each foreign leader "personal" messages of "substance," and some observers read more into this remark than now seems justified.

The other was Mr. Agnew's hectic and at times turbulent visit to South Korea, where a two-hour discussion of America's military commitment to the Seoul Government turned into a six-hour session with President Chung Hee Park.

The length of that meeting gave rise to the impression that Mr. Agnew had gone to Korea to negotiate new defense arrangements to compensate for the withdrawal of United States troops over five years.

San Clemente for guidance and instructions.

Officials here also note that if Mr. Agnew had been sent on a negotiating mission to Asia he would have been provided with a stronger supporting cast. But his advisory staff consisted mainly of one official from the staff of Henry A. Kissinger—Robert Houdek—whose normal assignment is press relations, and a few State Department officials.

For the most part, moreover, Mr. Agnew stuck to familiar, general topics at each stop. In Saigon, for example, he discussed Vietnamization and land reform, but steered clear of touchier and more complicated subjects such as devaluation. The trip to Taiwan, meanwhile, is regarded here as obligatory but not important and the stop in Pnompenh as very important but essentially symbolic.

Officials here believe that despite its limited purpose, however, Mr. Agnew's mission might have backfired, had he said either too little or too much; and they are persuaded now that he struck the right note in conveying the President's intention to reduce the United States role. They say he managed to be firm without threatening, and in conveying Mr. Nixon's intention to maintain treaty commitments he managed to reassure without overpromising.

One Slip Conceded

His one slip, officials here will concede, was his statement on the first leg of the trip that the United States would do "everything we can" for the Lon Nol Government.

The remark seemed to confirm what most observers had long suspected—namely, that the Administration's commitment to Lon Nol is greater than it has publicly acknowledged—and also implied that the United States would reintroduce troops to insure his survival. But Mr. Agnew later rectified this in Pnompenh when he told Premier Lon Nol that the United States would supply his country with money and arms but not American troops.

In fact, however, arrangements to furnish a wing of F-4 phantom jet fighters and provide funds to modernize South Korea's Army had already been discussed with the Korean Government. Moreover, whenever Mr. Agnew was confronted with a new Korean demand—for example, President Park's demand that he put in writing his oral assurances of United States financial help—he called

no harm. Officials here will not publicly admit that the mission was partly if not primarily, designed to enhance Mr. Agnew's prestige before he embarks on a series of cross-country political tours to help Republican candidates this fall. But they will admit that he has certainly done himself