

Mood of White House Advisers:

NYTimes APR 29 1972

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Special to The New York Times

KEY BISCAVINE, Fla., April 28—If there are two words to describe the mood of the White House, they are hope and uncertainty.

There is hope for the South Vietnamese soldiers, but uncertainty about the outcome of the struggle; there is hope for the Paris talks, but no clear view of what they will yield.

And since Vietnam is clearly a major domestic problem for President Nixon, there are a few signs of nervousness about his political future as well.

Nobody at the White House is showing signs of panic; all of his aides think that if the election were held today he would win. But for once, the men in the White House do not seem agreed on the political consequences of Mr. Nixon's decision to resist the North Vietnamese invasion with increased airpower, or his speech Wednesday night appealing for fortitude and patience on the part of the public.

Some senior assistants — including John Connally, the Secretary of the Treasury — are telling reporters that the President thinks the war might, in time, cost him the election; others, however, are saying that a majority of the people (enough, anyway, to elect him) understand and support what he is doing. The latter flourish private polls to help prove their case.

Differences of Opinion

Although all factions in the White House agree that much depends on the progress of the fighting and of the negotiations, there are at least three schools of thought on the present political effects of Mr. Nixon's Vietnam policy.

One is typified by a senior Administration official who briefed six reporters a week ago. He was later identified as Mr. Connally by the Columbia Broadcasting System and others who were not invited to the session.

Speaking earnestly and with considerable personal pride that he had been privy to the President's bombing decision and had supported it, Mr. Con-

nally portrayed Mr. Nixon as a man of conviction and courage who believed that America's credibility in the councils of the world must be preserved at all costs. Even if one of those costs was the President's political future.

The secretary asserted that most of Mr. Nixon's advisers, while not resisting his decision, warned that he would suffer costly political setbacks by heating up the campuses, stirring unrest, and giving the divided Democrats an issue.

Yet the President went ahead anyway, according to Mr. Connally, in order to bequeath to his successor in the White House a "viable" foreign policy.

As Mr. Connally portrayed the situation, both he and the President agreed that the bombing decision would hurt him.

Some See Political Gain

But this is not the way others in the White House are assessing the consequences. In their view, and these aides include two or three of Mr. Nixon's most trusted political advisers, the President's decision is likely to yield political

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profit. As evidence, they are citing a recent poll by Albert E. Sindlinger, an analyst of business and consumer attitudes based in Swarthmore, Pa.

Mr. Sindlinger is a favorite poll-taker of Charles W. Colson, one of the President's political advisers. There is no evidence that Mr. Colson or anyone else in the White House arranged it, but last Friday—on the very day when Mr. Connally was presenting his thoughts — Mr. Sindlinger held a rare news conference at the Mayflower Hotel to announce that a random sample of 4,774 adults on April 17, after the bombing of Hanoi and Hai-phong, suggested that public approval of the President's efforts to settle the war had not diminished and had, in fact, marginally increased.

Still a third group of advisers frankly refuses to guess at the consequences. But they worry that Mr. Nixon's bombing will remind many voters of the policies of his predecessor, Lyndon B. Johnson, and the foreign policy establishment of the nineteen-sixties and thus hurt

his chances of capitalizing—as he might have been able to do—with some of his domestic programs—on the "antiestablishment" sentiment reflected in recent Democratic primaries.

Whatever his private thoughts, Mr. Nixon himself seems to be operating on the assumption that people can be made to see the bombing as a necessary response to aggression; that there are enough people around who want an "honorable" settlement whose latent support can be reawakened.

The probably explains the President's direct appeal to the nation Wednesday night to stand fast for just a bit longer. It explains, too, the obvious delight with which some prominent centrist Republican Senators—including George Aiken of Vermont and Robert Griffin of Michigan—have joined in condemning the Democratic doves and sharpening the Vietnam issue.

And whatever their differences on the consequences of the President's decision, his aides agree on one point: that he meant it when he said that he intends to use what power he has left to prevent "defeat."