

JUN 25 1972

NYTimes

# U.S. Electoral Shadows

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PARIS—American Presidential campaigns sometimes cast long shadows overseas and this particularly appears to be the case in 1972. Already one foreign ambassador has been re-proached for hints of intervention and, far more important, many capitals appear to be taking exceptional interest in the projected contest.

By now it is widely accepted as certain that Senator McGovern will oppose President Nixon and that, even if there are modifications in his attitude on some issues between now and Election Day, there will be a striking difference in the platforms on which the two candidates stand. Already calculations are being made on that assumption.

The area most obviously concerned is Southeast Asia. Mr. Nixon has played remarkable three-cushion bil-

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liards in trying to settle the Indochina war before November and he has done what seemed to be impossible—enlisted both Chinese and Soviet support for his project, although separately and not simultaneously.

His dramatic visits to Peking and Moscow, when added to his imposition of a blockade on North Vietnam and the blunting of the Communist offensive, entirely changed the conflict's ambience. Chou En-lai rushed to Hanoi right after Mr. Nixon had left China to explain what was discussed.

At no time does there appear to have been in Peking as strong a commitment to back a Nixon peace program as there subsequently was in Moscow. The Russians were enticed by the prospect of better relations with the West, enabling them to look more sternly at China, and also by

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the prospect of access to complex U.S. technical equipment.

For these reasons, one may assume, Podgorny was dispatched to Hanoi to press for a compromise peace. As a signal afterward, he gave an unusual press conference in Calcutta. But, despite Soviet preponderance in North Vietnam, the Russian President seems to have failed.

Nor is there any convincing evidence that Kissinger, in a subsequent journey to Peking, was able to enlist concurrent Chinese pressures for settlement. The paramount goal China seeks is to supplant Soviet influence in Indochina.

So far, despite the brutal fact that North Vietnam is now weaker, more isolated and more bruised than at any time this year, its tough Spartan regime shows no signs of yielding. Maybe—and one hopes this is the case—it will yet agree to send its envoys back to Paris and negotiate a compromise. But maybe—measuring the effect of the war on the U.S. elections—it won't.

The North Vietnamese, in a bitter-end mood, could decide to gamble that continued fighting will seriously damage Mr. Nixon's chances for re-election. A hint of this truculent determination was shown by the failure of either Premier Pham Van Dong or General Giap to even see Podgorny in Hanoi.

Thus the U.S. campaign plays a definite role in Indochina—and vice versa. The gamble facing Hanoi's Politburo is whether McGovern can win

and will then offer a swift, soft peace or whether, after stubbornly holding out until Election Day, North Vietnam will find Mr. Nixon again in office—and not in the least pleased by Hanoi's previous obduracy.

In Europe, likewise, there is keen interest in the campaign. McGovern's pledge to slice \$32 billion from American defense budget sends shivers through NATO, although it isn't thought possible he will stand by that excessive figure. Nevertheless, any appreciable cut could disintegrate the alliance.

Furthermore, neither of the most bruted East-West projects—a European security conference or mutual and balanced force reductions—can start until after the elections. But should the United States decide on immense cuts in its own defense pledges, obviously Russia will see no reason to balance this with an equivalent on its own part. It would prefer getting something for nothing.

Nobody can yet reckon what the precise electoral program of the two candidates will be or what status the Vietnam war will have by autumn. Despite everything, Hanoi may decide to negotiate a reasonable settlement soon, perhaps assuming Mr. Nixon will win and would be tougher afterward.

This is all speculation. But it is not speculation that foreign governments are starting to regard this U.S. Presidential contest with more fascination and, in some cases, with more concern than any similar election in twenty years.