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By Lyndon B. Johnson: Withdrawal from the Race

INSTALLMENT IX

Following is the ninth of 11 installments of excerpts from Lyndon Baines Johnson's memoirs of his Presidential years, which will be published by Holt, Rinehart & Winston on Nov. 1 under the title "The Vantage Point: Perspectives of the Presidency, 1963-1969":

When I took the oath as President in January, 1965, to begin my first full term in office, I felt that it would be my last, and this feeling grew stronger with every passing week in the White House.

Two hospitalizations for surgery while I was in the White House had sharpened my apprehensions about my health. My heart attack of 1955 seemed well behind me, but I was conscious that it was part of the background of my life—just as I was conscious of my family's history of stroke and heart disease. I did not fear death so much as I feared disability. Whenever I walked through the Red Room and saw the portrait of Woodrow Wilson hanging there, I thought of him stretched out upstairs in the White House, powerless to move, with the machinery of the American Government in disarray around him. And I remembered Grandmother Johnson, who had had a stroke and stayed in a wheelchair throughout my childhood, unable even to move her hands or to speak so that she could be understood.

I have very strong feelings about work. When it is there to be done, I do it. And the work of the Presidency is demanding and unrelenting. It is always there to be done. Of all the 1,886 nights I was President, there were not many when I got to sleep before 1 or 2 A.M., and there were few mornings when I didn't wake up by 6 or 6:30. It became a question of how much the physical constitution could take. I frankly did not believe in 1968 that I could survive another four years of the long hours and unremitting tensions I had just gone through.

These were considerations I had lived with from the beginning. Others had developed in the course of events. On that last morning in March, as I moved

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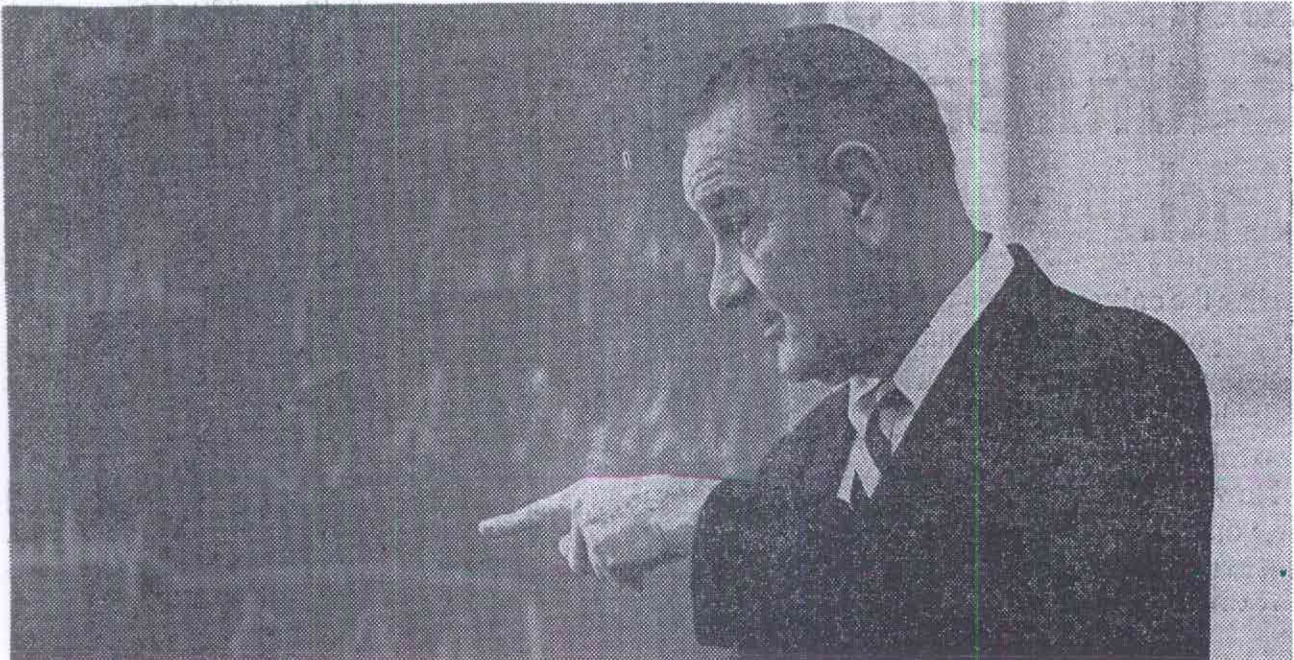


Y. R. Okamoto

At the White House, Mr. Johnson briefed Congressional leaders on the proposed tax bill in August, 1967

toward one of the most significant hours of my life, several factors relating to the state of the nation fed into the decisions I was preparing to announce. First, we faced the absolute necessity of an increase in taxes. For two years the Chairman of the Council of Economic Advisers had been stressing the need for a tax increase in the strongest terms. I knew that the stability of the dollar and the economic health of the nation and the world demanded an increase at the earliest possible time. I also knew that the likelihood of obtaining the necessary Republican votes to propel a tax bill through Congress, particularly in an election year, would be close to zero if I were a candidate. Second, we faced the possibility of new riots and turmoil in the cities.

Finally, there was the question of Vietnam. I had been preparing a speech on this subject to deliver to the American people late in March. I wanted to announce our new initiative for peace. If we were going to take the risk of a bombing pause, I felt I should make it clear that my decision had been made without political considerations.

For several years Lady Bird and I had spoken many times about our plans to leave the White House at the end of my first full term. Her position had remained perfectly clear and consistent since she had first expressed it to me in the spring of 1964: She did not want me to be a candidate in 1968. We discussed often how to select the proper time and the right occasion to make the announcement.

Long before I had settled on the proper forum to make my announcement, I told a number of people of my intention not to run again. As far back as [illegible] 1965 I had discussed the subject with Willard Deason, whom I had known for many years.

A few months afterward, late in the fall of 1965, I confided in Arthur Krim. He and his wife, Mathilde, were loyal and devoted friends, and Arthur was a valued adviser on matters relating to the Democratic party. On this occasion we were discussing ways to reduce the Democratic National Committee's debt. I said that I regarded the debt as a personal one, to be paid before I left the Presidency. In the course of the conversation Arthur observed that a strong committee would be important to me in 1968. I told him then that I would not be running in 1968. Over the following years I repeated my decision to him many times.

I talked with John Connally early in 1967 at the LBJ Ranch. He was formulating plans of his own at the time. He told me that he had no desire to seek another term as Governor but that he would run again if I wanted him on the ticket with me in Texas. I told him that I felt certain I would not run and suggested that he base his own decision on that assumption.

In September, 1967, I discussed the subject with another friend, George Christian, my press secretary. We were in Texas at the time, and I asked George to get Governor Connally's help in preparing a statement in which I could announce my decision. I thought then that I might find an appropriate occasion to use it later in the year.

I talked privately with both Dean Rusk and Bob McNamara, two of my most trusted advisers. At a meeting on Oct. 3, 1967, I again shared my thoughts with Secretaries Rusk and McNamara, and with several other top advisers who were present.

We had had a long session on the Middle East, nuclear planning, antiballistic missiles, Vietnam and other matters. I sat there wondering what the effect on these various pressing considerations would be if I were to announce my intention not to run for another term. Then I confided to the men assembled around the table the gist of my thinking. I told them that if I were announcing a decision at the moment, it would be not to stand for re-election.

In those final months, as the announcement of my decision neared, I believe only one thing could have changed my mind—an indication that the men in Vietnam would regard it as unfair or unwise. I asked General Westmoreland to come home in November, 1967, and I asked him what the effect on troop morale would be if I announced that I would not run for another term. Would the men think the Commander in Chief who sent them to the battlefield had let them down?

"Mr. President," he said, "I do not believe so."

Lady Bird had suggested March as the outside date for announcing my decision. March, 1968, proved to be exactly the right month for me for another reason: It coincided with the new effort I planned to seek the way to peace in Vietnam. I had found the right forum.

OUR daughter Lynda had been flying all night from California. She had just said good-by to her husband, who was leaving for duty in Vietnam. Mrs. Johnson and I got up early and were waiting at the south entrance of the White House to welcome her home.

Lynda had been reading about those demonstrators and critics who looked on such sacrifices as hers and Chuck's as meaningless or worse. The hurt that had been building up inside her was now released in a flood of tears. Why, she asked, was her husband going away to fight, and maybe die, for people who did not even want to be protected? It was a question that might have been asked by any young woman who had just seen her husband off to Vietnam. I wanted to comfort her and I could not.

That was the way the day started—March 31, 1968—a day that I profoundly hoped would mark the beginning of the end of the war that had brought so much pain and anguish to the people of my country. [Then] we drove to the apartment of Hubert and Muriel Humphrey. I met alone with the Vice President and told him of my plans. That afternoon I worked again on the final draft of my speech. I read the text of the speech aloud—without the ending. At 8:10 P.M., less than an hour before I was scheduled to go on the air, I turned the final paragraphs over to be put on the Teleprompter.

At 9:01 P.M., on a signal from the network director, I launched into the speech I had been preparing for so long. I described the enemy's Tet offensive, what it had tried to do and what it had failed to do. I announced our plans for strengthening the South Vietnamese armed forces, which had been expanded by the courageous response of the Vietnamese people to the attacks at Tet. I said it was time to begin talking peace anew. I was ready to take the first step to de-escalate the war.

"Tonight," I said, "I have ordered our aircraft and our naval vessels to make no attacks on North Vietnam, except in the area north of the demilitarized zone, where the continuing enemy build-up directly threatens allied forward positions and where the movements of their troops and supplies are clearly related to that threat."

I voiced my hope that Hanoi would match our restraint, so that we could halt even limited bombing, and that both sides would sit down together soon to bargain for peace. Finally, I said:

"With America's sons in the fields far away, with America's future under challenge right here at home, with our hopes and the world's hopes for peace in the balance every day, I do not believe that I should devote an hour or a day of my time to any personal partisan causes or to any duties other than the awesome duties of this office—the Presidency of your country.

"Accordingly, I shall not seek, and I will not accept, the nomination of my party for another term as your President."

The phones started ringing. The telephone operators reported later that the switchboard was lighted up throughout the night. Basically, all the calls expressed the same sentiments. They were messages wishing me well from people who simply wanted me to know they were thinking of me.

IN the days of the old economics Federal spending was generally regarded, in Congressional rhetoric, as close to sin—unless it was for your own constituency. A budget surplus was the height of virtue, a deficit the symbol of shame. Political figures regularly compared the Federal budget to a family budget and warned of disaster if it remained in the red for long. Recessions and depressions were the unavoidable evils of a business cycle in which expansion and decline followed one another as winter follows autumn.

With the triumph of the new economics in the enactment of the tax cut of 1964, most of these stereotypes seemed to be laid to rest. True to its sponsors' promise, the tax cut brought our economy close to full employment. It stimulated economic expansion, increased production and strengthened consumer markets. Unemployment fell to its lowest level in eight years. But this achievement was short-lived. Our sluggish economy had indeed been stim- [illegible]

ulated, but with the rising cost of the war in Vietnam on top of growing consumer demand, the economy was dangerously close to overheating late in 1965. We tried to cool it down, but with each passing month inflation rose.

In the new economics the remedy was theoretically clear: immediate government action. Just as the tax cut had stimulated a sluggish economy, so a tax increase was needed to cool an overheated economy. Action proved impossible until the spring of 1968, when the international gold market crisis made clear the vital connection between passing the tax bill and avoiding an international monetary catastrophe, and when my withdrawal from politics reduced the political heat surrounding the tax issue.

Early in 1967 we estimated that a 6 per cent tax surcharge, to become effective the following July, would slow inflation without risking a recession. I urged the Congress again to pass a surcharge in my State of the Union Message on Jan. 10, 1967. We could not get action on it for the first six months of that year since the combination of monetary restraints and the repeal of investment credit had produced a serious pile-up of inventories and the temporary threat of recession.

By July, 1967, however, the economy was moving up again, and it was clear that even a 6 per cent surcharge would not be enough. On these and other details I consulted with the Congress through Wilbur Mills.

Before the message was sent to the Hill, I asked for a survey of the initial reactions of key committee members and interest groups to the proposed bill. This checklist was compiled by members of the White House Congressional liaison staff, the appropriate Cabinet members and agency staff men. On the tax issue, Secretary of the Treasury Fowler and Under Secretary Joe Barr were responsible for checking the House Democrats, Commerce Secretary Alexander Trowbridge coordinated the check on business and labor, and agency staff men contacted Republican senators and congressmen. There is nothing mysterious about this technique. Each man received a list of people to contact and was expected, within one or two days, to describe the attitudes and opinions of those consulted. Taken together, the individual readings gave us a rough estimate of the Congressional feeling on the issue at stake.

The key to accurate head counts is personal knowledge or trust and the ability to probe beneath the surface to see what individuals are really thinking and feeling. If a liaison man knew his contacts well—if he knew who was irritated about what, who had a tough election ahead and who had ambitions for higher office—he could judge their reactions in one conversation or phone call. But if he did not know his men well, he might never be able to interpret tone, nuance, and spirit. Without this kind of preparation, checks on specific legislation are of little use.

By this time business leaders argued that the tax increase should be accompanied by significant spending cuts; labor leaders argued for taxing corporations at twice the rate charged for individuals.

It was late in November, 1967, before we got a workable compromise, embodied in a two-part legislative proposal: the first title incorporated the 10 per cent surtax and the second title spelled out a formula for spending reductions.

AS AUTUMN turned to winter and the Congressional session drew to a close, the tax bill remained locked up in the Ways and Means Committee. My willingness to compromise had sharpened the appetites of those who saw in this struggle a long-awaited chance to slash the Great Society programs. Every time we neared agreement on spending cuts, the ante was raised—from $2-billion to $4-billion to $6-billion. Something had to be done to break the stalemate, something outside ordinary bargaining channels.

I decided to take the issue to the people. I expressed my concern in every appropriate forum, including the 1968 State of the Union address, the budget message and the consumer message, urging—almost pleading—for a tax bill. The issue was never whether the American people should like the tax or not. Of course they would not like it; I did not like it either. The issue was whether they would dislike it as much as the consequences of *not* enacting the tax. Those consequences would be exorbitant prices, unparalleled interest rates and dangerous budget and balance-of-payments deficits.

Somehow, I never got those dangers across to the public or the Congress. For one thing, I failed to explain clearly enough that the surcharge was not a 10 per cent increase in the income tax rate but rather a tax on a tax, or 10 extra cents on every dollar of taxes—10 cents to buy an insurance policy against damaging inflation. Another thing I failed to get across was my deep concern about the state of the economy and the relation of the dollar to the world economy.

On March 22, in the midst of a debate on a bill the House had passed to extend automobile and telephone excise taxes, two Senators, George Smathers of Florida, a Democrat, and John Williams of Delaware, a Republican, jointly proposed a package of amendments to the excise bill. Included were two critical additions: our 10 per cent surcharge and a formula for cuts in spending. On April 2, two days after my public plea, the Senate passed the excise bill with the amendments.

We were concerned about the spending formula, which required us to cut outlays by $6-billion. Even if we agreed to the cut, would a majority of the House accept the conference report? This was where the head count became our most critical tool.

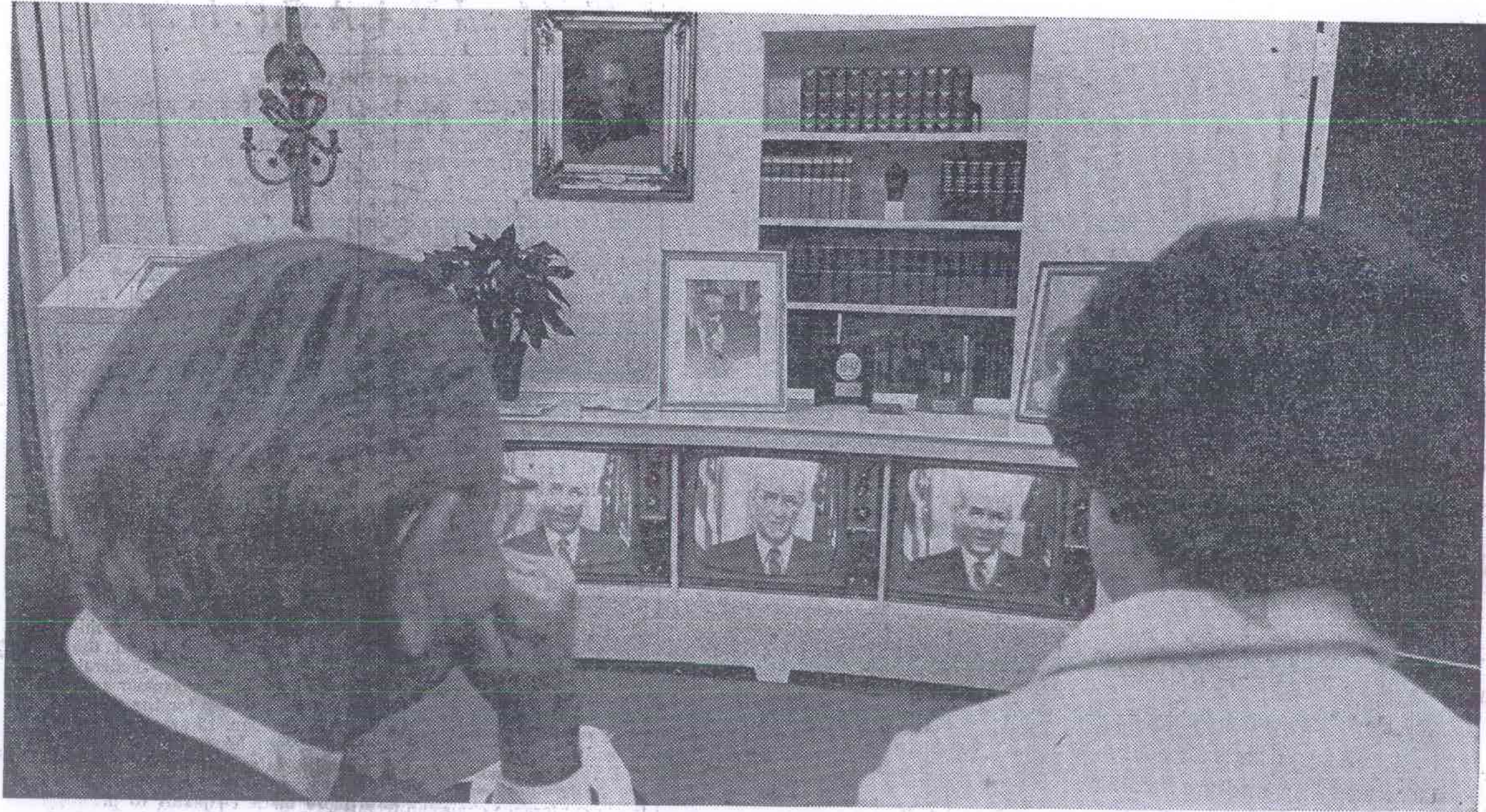
With so many factors at work, we knew that an accurate head count would be very difficult. But my liaison staff had been gathering information on the tax bill for 18 long months, and the final head count was simply a distillation of that intelligence. The members of Congress were asked not simply how they intended to vote but under what conditions they would vote yes or no. And on the basis of their answers the members were divided into five categories: "with us," "probably with us," "uncommitted," "probably against" and "against."

With the head count as our blueprint, the enormous job of individual persuasion began. We concentrated on the "uncommitteds" and those "probably against," attempting to develop an individual approach to meet the needs of each member.

Wild images have been concocted to describe this process of persuasion. A great deal of mystery surrounds the President's role. But the real task of persuasion is far less glamorous than the imagined one. It is tough, demanding work. For despite the stereotyped Presidential image, I could not trade patronage for votes in any direct exchange. If word spread that I was trading, everyone would want to trade and all other efforts at persuasion would automatically fail. To say this is not to say that rewards (such as White House tours, invitations to social functions, birthday greetings and Presidential photos) do not go to faithful congressmen. But these are generally delivered by the White House staff after the fact and on the basis of a pattern of voting, not by the President personally in exchange for a specific vote.

Nor could I rely on the "big threat" or direct reprisal to produce compliance. It is daydreaming to assume that any experienced congressman would ignore his basic instincts or his constituents' deepest concerns in quaking fear of the White House. My best hope was to make a good, solid, convincing case for the Administration's position.

I tried in every possible way to make a convincing case on the surcharge to the Hill. First, we had to mobilize support in the outside community to ease the path for congressmen willing to join our effort. In the final days of May, with Secretary Fowler's help, a dozen organizations undertook active support of the surcharge. They included the American Bankers Association, the American Farm Bureau Federation, the National Association of Manufacturers and the Chamber of Commerce. In addition, a group of 500 business leaders, headed by such able men as Henry Ford, was organized specifically to stimulate support for the surcharge. These national leaders in turn contacted their local business representatives, asking each to speak to the congressman in his own district and let him know that the overwhelming preponderance of responsible businessmen strongly favored the conference report as the only source of sound fiscal policy. These last-minute visits and calls proved es-



Y. R. Okamoto

President and Mrs. Johnson viewing his announcement of complete bombing halt in the Oval Room of the White House on Oct. 31, 1968

pecially valuable in helping to sway many Republicans to our side.

Trying to stimulate traditional Democratic support was more difficult. For many months labor leaders had been deeply concerned about the impact of budget cuts on the Great Society programs.

At our Cabinet meeting on May 29 I assured the Cabinet officers that I hated the cut as much as they did, but I added: "It won't be anything like the headache or anything like as bad as saying to the world that we have no fiscal responsibility and we will not pass the tax bill. Therefore I want to ask for something I've never asked a Cabinet to do before. I want to see how much muscle we've got left—if any! I would like you to sit down with these 250 men [Democratic senators and congressmen] that you've been associated with, most of them for the last eight years, and see which ones you're willing to sit down and talk with. And say that our country is in trouble and here's why, and you hope they can accept this report, and, if they do, it will not tear their program to pieces."

I knew that in spite of their personal feelings the Cabinet officers would respond to the nation's interests. That same afternoon, they began canvassing the Hill.

Once again the head count became critical. In such a situation personal contact from the President can be decisive, but generally only with key members whose votes will have a multiplying effect on the votes of many others. So I had my own list of men to contact.

When I made these phone calls, I had no set script. Sometimes I would start with: "What's this I read about your opposing my bill?" Other times I would ask: "What do you think of this bill?" Or: "Say, Congressman, I haven't seen you around in a while, just wondering how you've been."

Finally, the day for the vote arrived—June 20, 1968. Just before 8 P.M. one of my aides handed me a message: "Mr. President: The House has just adopted the conference committee report—with the 10 per cent surcharge."

The next day, June 21, the Senate adopted the conference report, and the 10 per cent surcharge became the law of the land with my signature on June 28.

IF JULY 1, 1968, figures in the history books of the future, it will be because of what happened that morning in the East Room of the White House. A few minutes after 11:30 A.M., in that gold-draped room, before hundreds of witnesses and in the glare of television floodlights, representatives of the Soviet Union, the United Kingdom, the United States and more than 50 other nations signed the Treaty on the Nonproliferation of Nuclear Weapons. Under that treaty nations without nuclear weapons promised not to make them or receive them from others; the treaty assured those nations that they would have access to the full benefits of the peaceful uses of nuclear power. Nations with nuclear weapons pledged to work toward effective arms control and disarmament.

That night, as I thought about the day just ended, I remembered how much had gone before to bring us to the high point of hope.

Of all the agreements reached with Moscow the most difficult, and the most important, was the Treaty on the Nonproliferation of Nuclear Weapons. I have no doubt that the explosion of a nuclear device by Communist China in mid-October, 1964, heavily underlined in the minds of men in the Kremlin the necessity for a treaty limiting the spread of nuclear weapons. But though the need was evident, it took more than four years of painstaking and complicated diplomatic effort before we agreed on a draft of the treaty.

During the first half of 1968 I prodded Kosygin and his colleagues several times on the missile question. In June, 1968, an agreement finally began to take shape. On June 21 Kosygin wrote that he hoped it would soon be possible "more concretely to exchange views." Then, just before the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty was opened for signatures, Kosygin advised me that the Soviets were ready to publish in the Soviet press and to broadcast over the Soviet radio on July 1, 1968, the following statement:

"On the forthcoming talks on questions of curbing the strategic arms race:

"An agreement has been reached between the Governments of the U.S.S.R. and the U.S.A. to enter in the nearest future into talks on limitation and reduction of offensive strategic nuclear weapons delivery systems as well as systems of defense against ballistic missiles."

It was a moment of hope, but it came just as a new crisis threatened Europe. The people of Czechoslovakia were demanding more freedom. The old Stalinist Government under President Antonin Novotny had been overthrown and a more liberal regime under Alexander Dubcek took its place. The Dubcek Government was making concessions in the direction of greater liberty for the people. The Czechs avoided one thing, however, that had caused Moscow to react so violently in Hungary 12 years earlier: They did not threaten to leave the Warsaw Pact.

Nonetheless, the reverberations were felt throughout Eastern Europe. Old-line Communist leaders, such as Walter Ulbricht in East Germany, were dismayed. Conservatives in the Kremlin were no less disturbed. They all seemed to believe, and to fear, that if reforms succeeded in Czechoslovakia, demands for the same concessions would quickly spread to the Soviet Union and other Communist countries.

If anything drastic happened in Czechoslovakia, I knew it would derail, at least for a time, any chance to start strategic weapons talks. But on Aug. 19, 1968, Ambassador Dobrynin called on Rusk to inform him that the Soviet leaders had accepted our long-standing proposal to discuss peaceful uses of nuclear power.

That evening the Soviets delivered a message proposing an early announcement to this effect:

"An agreement has been reached that the President of the United States, Lyndon B. Johnson, will visit the Soviet Union in the first 10 days of October, 1968, for the exchange of opinions with the leaders of the U.S.S.R. on questions of mutual interest."

We discussed the Soviet messages, agreed to accept the proposals and planned to release the news on the morning of Aug. 21. The next day the White House press office prepared a news release on my planned trip to the Soviet Union.

As it turned out, our press release never reached the hands of the reporters. Ambassador Dobrynin had received a message from the highest level in his Government with instructions to deliver it personally to the President. The Ambassador was obviously tense. I tried to relax him by recalling our meeting at Glassboro. We talked a few minutes more, then the Ambassador's face turned serious once again. "Now, Mr. President," he said, "I have an urgent instruction from my Government to tell you about serious business. I will read it."

"The Government of the Soviet Union considers it necessary to inform, personally, President Johnson about the following. In connection with the further aggravation of the situation which was created by a conspiracy of the external and internal forces of aggression against the existing social order in Czechoslovakia and against the statehood established by the Constitution of that country, the Government of the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic approached the allied states, the Soviet Union among them, with a request of rendering direct assistance, including the assistance by military forces. . . .

"We proceed from the fact that the current events should not harm Soviet-American relations, to the development of which the Soviet Government as before attaches great importance."

Later that night I sat at the Cabinet table once again with the Vice President, Dean Rusk, Clark Clifford, C.I.A. Director Helms, General Wheeler and a few others to assess at length this latest development. I concluded there was nothing we could do immediately about the Czech situation, but I instructed Rusk to call in Dobrynin that same night and tell him that there would be no announcements about my visiting the Soviet Union or the technical nuclear talks.

After our meeting I called the Republican Presidential candidate, Richard Nixon, in New York City. I had promised to keep him informed of all major developments, and since Vice President Humphrey had been in the meeting, I thought Nixon should know what had happened. He was grateful for the information, he said, and assured me that he would say nothing that would make my job more difficult.

"You know how I feel," he said. "The hell with the election. We must all stand firm on this."

From the book "The Vantage Point: Perspectives of the Presidency, 1963-1969," by Lyndon Baines Johnson, to be published by Holt, Rinehart & Winston, Inc. © 1971 HEC Public Affairs Foundation.

Tomorrow: Movement toward peace in Vietnam conflict