By Lyndon B. Johnson: '68 Election and Final White House Days

A Friendly Word For Nixon Marks End of Memoirs

INSTALLMENT XI

Following is the last in the series of excerpts from the memoirs of Lyndon Baines Johnson, which will be published by Holt, Rinehart & Winston on Nov. 7 under the title "The Vantage Point: Perspectives of the Presidency, 1963-1969":

IF I had to pick a date that symbolized the turmoil we experienced throughout 1968, I think Jan. 23 would be the day—the morning the U.S.S. Pueblo was seized. The Pueblo incident formed the first link in a chain of events—of crisis, tragedy and disappointment—that added up to one of the most agonizing years any President has ever spent in the White House.

The Pueblo, a highly sophisticated electronics intelligence ship, had been cruising off the coast of North Korea gathering data from the mainland. Between 10:52 P.M. of Jan. 22 and 12:32 A.M. of the 23d, Washington time, the Pueblo was challenged and then surrounded by a flotilla comprised of a North Korean submarine chaser and three patrol boats, and was finally boarded by an armed party, while Communist jet fighters circled overhead. The Pueblo reported that the boarding took place approximately 15½ nautical miles from the nearest land under North Korean jurisdiction, well outside the 12-mile territorial limit claimed by North Korea. Aboard the ship were 6 officers, 75 enlisted men and 2 civilians. Four men were injured, one mortally.

The ship was virtually unarmed and unprotected. This fact prompted former Vice President Richard Nixon to term the Pueblo incident a "tactical blunder," but there were good reasons for the lack of cover. The cost of providing military protection for all our sea and air intelligence operations would have been prohibitively expensive, and under any circumstances such armed protection so close to their shores would have been provocative to foreign governments.

The unanswered question was why the North Koreans had seized the Pueblo. Piracy on the high seas is a serious matter. Why had North Korea flagrantly risked stirring up an international hornet's nest and perhaps starting a war?

The North Koreans charged that the Pueblo had violated their territorial waters. They claimed that they had seized the ship only seven miles offshore. We had proof that this charge was false, not only from the Pueblo's reports, but from our own radio "fix" on the ship at the time of the incident. We did not know, of course, whether the ship had inadvertently drifted too close to shore before it was challenged, but we considered this possibility unlikely. The Pueblo was under strict orders to stay well outside the territorial limits, and given the sensitive mission it was conducting, we doubted that the captain and the crew would be so careless.

What did the North Koreans hope to accomplish? Our best estimate, then, one that I believe holds up well in the light of subsequent events, is that they were aware of the Tet offensive in Vietnam, which was scheduled to take place eight days later. They were trying to divert U.S. military resources from Vietnam and to pressure the South Koreans into recalling their two divisions from that area, for the seizure of the Pueblo was not an isolated incident. The number of border violations and flare-ups along the 38th Parallel in Korea had increased sharply in the previous weeks.

As a result, South Korea was nervous and was seriously considering withdrawing military units from Vietnam to build up defensive strength at home. One of our first actions after the Pueblo incident was to dispatch more than 350 aircraft to our air bases in South Korea and to recall to active duty selected units of the Air National Guard and Air Force Reserve to replace our strategic reserve in the United States.

In response, the North Koreans promptly announced that the crew of the Pueblo would be tried and punished as criminals. This announcement pointed up our dilemma. We could not allow our indignation to dictate our response, even though that is the course many Americans would have preferred. We knew that if we wanted our men to return home alive, we had to use diplomacy. If we resorted to military means, we could expect dead bodies. And we also might start a war.

In spite of every effort we could make, in spite of our patient attempts to balance firmness with reason, and in spite of our innumerable diplomatic moves, 11 miserable months went by before the men of the Pueblo were given their freedom. Every day that passed during those 11 months, the plight of those men obsessed and haunted me.

MARCH was a month of profound political frustrations. I was delaying announcement of my decision not to be a Presidential candidate in 1968. That delay resulted in several misunderstandings and disappointments, the most obvious of which was the New Hampshire primary of March 12 I must admit that the results surprised me. I was not expecting a landslide. I had not spent a single day campaigning in New Hampshire and my name was not even on the ballot. And the fact that I received more votes, as a write-in candidate, than Senator McCarthy—49.5 per cent as against 42.4 per cent — seems to have been overlooked or forgotten. Still, I think most people were surprised that Senator McCarthy rolled up the vote he did. I was much less surprised when Bobby Kennedy announced his candidacy four days later. I had been expecting it.

For a few fleeting hours on April 3 I thought that history had turned a corner and that the "bad days" were behind us. Hanoi responded favorably to my March 31 speech and announced that its representatives were ready to

Y. R. Okamoto

The President being diverted by his grandson, Patrick Lyn Nugent, during briefing by Gen. William C. Westmoreland, Vietnam commander

meet with us. I felt deep satisfaction in the knowledge that by refusing to be a candidate for the Presidency, I might have hastened the day when peace would come to Vietnam. But satisfaction turned to sorrow in less than 24 hours. On April 4 Martin Luther King Jr. was slain by a sniper and it became immediately clear that his assassination had compounded the danger of violence. I postponed my planned Vietnam conference in Hawaii and went on television to appeal to reason.

On June 5, while we were still recovering from the shock of Dr. King's assassination, Senator Robert Kennedy was shot and killed in Los Angeles on the night of his California primary victory over Senator McCarthy. Another voice that spoke for America's poor and dispossessed was stilled forever.

When tragedy struck him down, I was glad that my last meeting with Bobby Kennedy had been friendly. That meeting had been the result of a public promise I had made, following my announcement that I would not accept the Democratic nomination, to brief all the major Presidential candidates. Senator Kennedy had asked to see me and I immediately arranged a meeting with him in the White House. Shortly after 10 A.M. on April 3 he came into the Cabinet Room with his campaign aide Ted Sorensen and met with Walt Rostow, Charles Murphy and me for more than an hour. The discussion was an open and frank one. Both Murphy and Rostow took notes.

The following notes reflect the tenor of that session:

The President opened the meeting by referring to his speech of March 31, in which he announced the new initiative with respect to Vietnam and his intention not to run for re-election. He said that he wished and hoped to find areas of agreement because of the critical need to do so in the national interest. He referred to the critical nature of problems facing us and spoke particularly of the explosive situation in the Middle East and of our fiscal and monetary problems. He told Senator Kennedy he had no desire to be a political boss or to determine the Senator's future....

The President said that he would have his own judgments and would exercise them, but except for a few fund-raising dinners, he planned to keep out of campaign politics.

Senator Kennedy—Your speech was magnificent. I regret we have not had closer contact. Will be glad to try to help in minimizing controversy and to keep in touch through anyone you say. Your position is unselfish and courageous and taken in the interest of the United States....

The President—Feel free to talk to Murphy, Rostow or DeVier Pierson. I'll be glad to meet with you at any time.

Senator Kennedy—Thank you very much. Can I ask about the political situation? Where do I stand in the campaign? Are you opposed to my effort and will you marshal forces against me?

The President—I expressed it in my speech. I want to keep the Presidency out of this campaign. I'm not that pure, but I am that scared. The situation of the country is critical. I will try to run this office so as to have as much support and as few problems as possible. I will tell the Vice President about the same things I'm telling you. I don't know whether he will run or not. If he asks my advice, I won't give it....

Senator Kennedy—If you decide later on to take a position, can we talk to you prior to that?

The President—Yes, unless I lose my head and pop off. I will try to honor your request.

The President told Senator Kennedy that he held no enmity for him. He said frankly that he felt much closer to the Vice President, who had been everything the President could ask as Vice President....

President Kennedy had always treated him well as Vice President, although he spoke very frankly and sometimes sharply. He had done his best as Vice President to support President Kennedy. (Senator Kennedy agreed.) He had done his best since then to carry on the policies and programs. He thought he had done reasonably well. . . .

Nevertheless, the President said, what he had done had not been good enough. Witness our current difficulties. . . . The next man who sits in this chair will have to do better.

Senator Kennedy—You are a brave and dedicated man.

That was the last time I saw Senator Kennedy.

THE resignation of Chief Justice Earl Warren in June represented a double blow to me. His departure from the Court deprived the nation of the services of a man whom I considered one of the great Supreme Court Justices in our history and resulted in the deliberate and systematic vilification of one of the wisest, ablest, and fairest men I have ever known, Associate Justice Abe Fortas. The irony of that episode was that Abe Fortas had never wanted to sit on the Supreme Court in the first place.

The events leading to his appointment began on the afternoon of July 16, 1965, when Ambassador John Kenneth Galbraith and his wife visited me in the Oval Office. During our conversation, Galbraith said that he believed Arthur Goldberg, then an Associate Justice on the Court, would step down from his position to take a job that would be more challenging to him.

Three days later Justice Goldberg flew to Illinois with me to attend Ambassador Stevenson's funeral. I mentioned that I had heard reports that he might step down from the Court and therefore might be available for another assignment. He told me these reports had substance. I said that I would like to see him in the Cabinet as Secretary of Health, Education and Welfare because that was a department which required imagination and leadership at the top. He replied that the job sounded fascinating but that he had become increasingly interested in foreign affairs.

That was the extent of our conversation that day. I asked Justice Goldberg to "think about it some more" and said that we would discuss it later. The next day he called Jack Valenti and told him that the job he would accept was the U.N. ambassadorship, if I offered it to him. I appointed him to the United Nations and I felt he was an excellent choice. Subsequently I nominated Abe Fortas to fill the vacant seat on the Court.

I was confident that the man would be a brilliant and able jurist. He had the experience and the liberalism to espouse the causes that both I and Arthur Goldberg believed in. He had the strength of character to stand up for his own convictions, and he was a humanitarian. Abe Fortas, reared in Memphis, Tenn., with a career as a distinguished lawyer in Washington for over 30 years, did not want the job. I urged him to accept the nomination but he declined firmly. He said that he did not want it. Then, on July 19, he wrote me:

> For the President:
>
> Again, my dear friend, I am obligated and honored by your confidence and generosity—to an extent which is beyond my power adequately to acknowledge.
>
> But after painful searching, I've decided to decline—with a heart full of gratitude. Carol thinks I should accept this greatest honor that a lawyer could receive—this highest appointive post in the nation. But I want a few more years of activity. I want a few more years to try to be of service to you and the Johnson family. And I want and feel that in justice I should take a few more years to stabilize this law firm in the interests of the young men who have enlisted here.
>
> This has been a hard decision—but not nearly as hard as another which had the virtue of continuing association with your trials and tribulations and greatness.
>
> I shall always be grateful.
>
> *Abe*

We talked about the matter for the next several days, but I could not sway him. Finally, on July 28, I invited Fortas to my office. When he came in, I told him that I was about to go over to the theater in the East Wing of the White House to announce his appointment to the Supreme Court. I said that he could stay in my office or accompany me to the theater, but that since he was the person being appointed, I thought he should go with me. He looked at me in silence for a moment. I waited. Then he said, "I'll accompany you." That was the only way I managed to get him on the Court. When I nominated

Fortas to succeed Chief Justice Warren three years later, I did so for the same reasons I had first appointed him to the Court.

Ed Weisl Sr., a friend and an outstanding New York lawyer, reported that Senator Richard Russell had informed him that although he would vote for Fortas for Chief Justice, he would

"enthusiastically support" Judge Homer Thornberry [of Texas] if he were nominated to the Court. I thought that Russell's stand would provide strong insurance against a Southern filibuster opposing Justice Fortas.

I called Senator Russell to the White House on June 25 and sought his counsel firsthand. He repeated what he had told Ed Weisl.

On June 26, 1968, I announced my intention to send the nominations of Abe Fortas and Homer Thornberry to the Senate.

In the end, Abe Fortas's chief assets—his progressive philosophy, his love of country, his frank views always spoken from the heart and his service to his President—brought his downfall.

I had my first inkling of trouble after I called Senator James Eastland, chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee, and asked him to come and see me. I recounted my conversation with Senator Russell, hoping that the judgment of that respected Southerner would moderate Eastland's position. My reference to Senator Russell's statement did not faze him in the slightest. He replied that he had strenuous objections to Fortas and was irritated over a speech the Associate Justice had made in New York earlier in the year. In that speech Fortas had said that the battles of the black man for equality in America were essentially the same as those of the Jew and that Jews must help in the civil-rights struggle. Senator Eastland interpreted that statement as a conspiratorial call for Jews and Negroes to take over America. He said that he was aware of Senator Russell's position but that he did not think that in the end, when all the debate was over, Senator Russell would support Fortas. His prediction proved accurate.

I strongly believed that Eastland had received assurances that if he blocked the Fortas nomination and the Republicans captured the White House in November, a Chief Justice more to his liking would be appointed.

I realized after that August meeting that we probably could not muster the votes to put the Fortas nomination through. Two months later, after the Senate refused, by a vote of 45 to 43, to consider his nomination, Justice Fortas bowed to the inevitable and asked that his name be withdrawn. I complied with his request with a heavy heart.

Y. R. Okamoto

Six days after the 1968 election, the President briefed President-elect Nixon and took the Nixons on a tour of the White House.

I NEVER shared the intense dislike of Richard Nixon felt by many of my fellow Democrats. I had served with him in the House of Representatives and in the Senate, and I was Senate majority leader during most of his term as President of the Senate. I considered him a much-maligned and misunderstood man. I looked upon Nixon as a tough, unyielding partisan and a shrewd politician, but always a man trying to do the best for his country as he saw it. I did, however, disagree strongly with his political philosophy. I believed that if he were elected, he would certainly try to undo many of the hard-won achievements of the New Frontier and the Great Society.

It is always difficult to interpret the outcome of an election, but I have several observations to make about the election in 1968. First, I believe that Saigon's misinterpretation of our Vietnam policy, a misinterpretation exploited by some people who claimed to speak for the Nixon camp, damaged Vice President Humphrey's election chances. Politically, I was not overly partisan in the campaign because I had promised the nation in my speech on March 31 that I would keep the Presidency out of politics and because that obviously was what the Humphrey organization preferred.

Part of Saigon's foot-dragging about attending the Paris talks, I believed, stemmed from the Vice President's foreign-policy speech in Salt Lake City on Sept. 30, a speech that was widely interpreted as a refutation of the Administration's Vietnam policy, particularly with respect to bombing. That interpretation was not discouraged by several Humphrey aides who briefed the press after the speech. The facts are that the Vice President called me from Salt Lake City before he made the speech to tell me about it and to say that it was not intended to be a major departure from our current policies. I believe he meant it.

But what I believed was less important than what the leaders of the Government in Saigon construed from the Vice President's statements. They interpreted the speech, and the tone of Vice President Humphrey's subsequent foreign policy statements, as a major departure from our stated policies. We soon learned that the leaders in Saigon suspected the Administration of sending up a trial balloon. This suspicion made them extremely nervous and distrustful of the Johnson-Humphrey Administration and of the entire Democratic party.

Against this background, people who claimed to speak for the Nixon camp began encouraging Saigon to stay away from Paris and promising that Nixon, if elected, would inaugurate a policy more to Saigon's liking. Those efforts paid off. On Nov. 1, after previously indicating that they would go to the Paris peace talks, the South Vietnamese leaders decided not to participate. That, I am convinced, cost Hubert Humphrey the Presidency, especially since a shift of only a few hundred thousand votes would have made him the winner.

But that circumstance explains only one aspect of the 1968 election. Another essential aspect of the election was the fact that the Democratic party had pressed too far out in front of the American people.

The blue-collar worker felt that the Democratic party had traded his welfare for the welfare of the black man. The middle-class suburbanite felt that we were gouging him in order to pay for the antipoverty programs. The black man, having tasted the fruits of equality, began demanding his rightful share of the American promise faster than most of the nation was willing to let him have it.

The disruptive methods of the radicals of the "new left," at the Chicago convention and on university campuses, offended the majority of American citizens and pushed them to the right. The violence in Chicago was one of the greatest political assets Nixon had. The extremists made it impossible for us to carry states like Oklahoma, Kentucky and Tennessee, which should have been solid Humphrey states.

In spite of this, I am convinced that if I had run again I would have been re-elected. The last polls taken in February and March, before I announced I would not run, indicated I could have defeated Richard Nixon, with or without George Wallace in the running. That does not alter the point, but it reflects the fact that the American people do not casually turn an incumbent President out of office. (Whether they would have united behind me once they had returned me to office is another question—one that I had serious reservations about.)

Six days after his victory, President-elect Nixon and Mrs. Nixon came to the White House for lunch and nearly four hours of conferences and briefings. Mrs. Johnson and I took the Nixons on a tour of the second-floor living quarters of the Executive Mansion. I was surprised to learn that it was the first time either of them had seen that part of the White House, in spite of the eight years they had spent in the Eisenhower Administration. Following the briefings, we went out to meet the White House press corps, and the President-elect made an extremely gracious and unexpected gesture. He announced:

"... If progress is to be made on matters like Vietnam, the current possible crisis in the Mideast, the relations between the United States and the Soviet Union with regard to certain outstanding matters—if progress is to be made in any of these fields, it can be made only if the parties on the other side realize that the current Administration is setting forth policies that will be carried forward by the next Administration.... I gave assurance in each instance to the Secretary of State and, of course, to the President, that they could speak not just for this Administration but for the nation, and that meant for the next Administration as well."

Later in the week Mr. Nixon apparently had second thoughts about giving me such sweeping support, and he announced that he had made this pledge with the understanding that there would be "prior consultation and prior agreement" between the two of us before I took any major step in foreign policy. I was surprised by that statement. There had been no promise ever requested or given that there would be "prior consultation and prior agreement."

I certainly did not want to destroy all the goodwill we had built up over the past several months by launching into a public debate with Mr. Nixon. But I could not allow the impression to stand that Mr. Nixon had become a kind of co-President. I announced to the press that "the decisions that will be made between now and Jan. 20 will be made by this President and by this Secretary of State and by this Secretary of Defense." That cleared up the misunderstanding and the President-elect and I remained on cordial terms.

ON the last night of my term of office, Jan. 19, Lady Bird and I held a small, informal party in the second-floor living quarters of the White House for the members of my staff. In many ways it was a moving and emotional occasion, for we had developed a closeness in our time together. When it was over and the last guest gone, I walked over to the West Wing to do some final work at my desk. I wandered lonely through the empty offices, silent now after so many months of activity, to make sure that everything was in order for the Nixon take-over the next day. When I walked into one office I noticed a sheet of paper on the desk. Thinking that it was a piece of scrap paper, I started to throw it in the wastebasket until I read what was written on it. The message was for the next man who would sit at that desk. It was signed by the aide who had vacated the office, and it read: "Good luck."

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.