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## Political Forecast

# A British View: LBJ to Resign, Elevate HHH

The following article is a personal assessment of the current political scene by a British correspondent covering the White House—and what might happen in the coming months. It is written by Henry Fairlie of the London Daily Express.

By HENRY FAIRLIE

WASHINGTON — President Johnson will resign before the Democratic Convention in August.

Vice-President Hubert Humphrey will thus automatically become President.

The Democratic Convention will then have no course open to it but to nominate him.

One cannot be quite as definite as that. But many politicians in Washington, including a powerful member of President Johnson's Government, are convinced that this is how it will happen.

The first factor is President Johnson's health.

It is causing embarrassment to many of those who have to deal with him.

It is the explanation they give for his uneven performance, for the superb moments of instinctive political insight, followed by no consistent supporting action.

It is the explanation they give for the commanding position which the President established for himself three weeks ago, followed by a series of uncertain moves which now threaten to undermine that position.

Again and again, from those dealing with him on

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a day-to-day basis, one hears only the two words: "His health. . . ."

Some are expressing open alarm. Some are merely more bitter than ever at their relationship with a President on whose word they are finding it increasingly hard to rely. Some say the President himself knows.

This last is the vital point. If the President resigned on grounds of health, it is being said, it will not merely be a convenient political move to hurt Senator Robert Kennedy.

The President, according to those who take this view, now has his brooding moments.

It was in one of those moments, they say, that he elevated himself to such an astonishing height three weeks ago.

"He saw himself and his position," one of them said to me last week, "with an awful clarity. When he moves, it was as if he were answering the call of some fate."

Another told me: "The grandeur of that moment was the grandeur of a Greek tragedy. It was not merely that he could do nothing else, but that he saw so clearly that he had no choice."

According to those who think like this, the President is capable of the final act of abdication at any time this summer.

He would set up the talks with North Vietnam, and then be satisfied that his account with history would be settled in his favor.

On grounds of ill-health which are genuine and which he himself can recognise, he would quit the stage with reasonable honor.

But of course these considerations of health would coincide with the most persistent of his political considerations: how to ensure the defeat of Senator Robert Kennedy.

It is true that Senator Kennedy looks as if he will defeat himself. Unless he pulls off a now unexpected major victory in Indiana's May 7th primaries, he is no longer

given much chance of winning the Democratic nomination.

He is bringing pressure to bear on important political figures across the country in the crassest way.

One important Cleveland political figure who might have supported him fled during the past week after having his arm twisted in the familiar Kennedy embrace. The stories multiply. At the same time, Senator Eugene McCarthy is still holding away from Senator Kennedy a vital element of the public opinion which he thought he could attract.

Nothing, indeed, is more remarkable than the way in which the McCarthy support is sticking, absolutely unflinchingly, across the country.

But President Johnson will not rely on probability. His primary political object is to break Senator Kennedy, and to break him beyond hope of repair.

No move could make this more certain than to give the Presidency of the United States to Vice-President Hubert Humphrey before the Democratic Convention.

To do so would be different from supporting Vice President Humphrey as a candidate for the nomination.

It would be an act of state instead of an overt political act, and it would be beyond obvious criticism.

Morover, Vice President Humphrey has entered the presidential campaign — without yet announcing himself as a candidate — with such a bang that the thing could be done with conviction and credit.

Vice President Humphrey has already shown that he regards himself as free from the necessity to defend President Johnson as such.

If he refers to President Johnson at all in public, he does so as if he were talking about an already historical, already non-political figure.

He defends the Johnson-Humphrey Administration and not President Johnson. Already in three weeks he has gone a long way to establishing himself as his own man.