Politics:

DOES FOREIGN POLICY REALLY MATTER?

Do a candidate's thoughts on foreign policy really matter to voters in U.S. presidential campaigns? Can SALT, NATO, and GATT ever upstage domestic bread-and-butter issues? Opinions vary. France's philosopher Jean-François Revel views Americans as fundamentally indifferent to most events abroad; when foreign policy is an issue, he has written, Americans find that "wishful thinking is easier and lasts longer." In the wake of U.S. difficulties in Iran, William Bundy, editor of *Foreign Affairs,* sees the 1980 campaign shaping up as a donnybrook over "Who Lost Patagonia?" Here, political scientist Stephen Hess briskly surveys the last few presidential campaigns; he suggests that foreign policy, often for rather odd reasons, *has* become important on Election Day.

by Stephen Hess

"You can say all you want about foreign affairs, but what is really important is the price of hogs in Chicago and St. Louis," said the Governor of Illinois, William G. Stratton.

The setting for the Governor's remark was a post-midnight meeting in Vice President Richard Nixon's suite at the Sheraton-Blackstone Hotel in Chicago. Only hours before, the delegates to the 1960 Republican National Convention had unanimously chosen Nixon as their presidential nominee, and the candidate had now summoned 36 party elders to advise him on choosing a running mate.

Ultimately Nixon rejected Stratton's advice and picked Henry Cabot Lodge, whose face was known to millions of American television viewers as their country's chief spokesman at the United Nations for nearly eight years. Later, explaining his decision, Nixon said: "If you ever let them [the Democrats] cam-

CRISES ABROAD AS CAMPAIGN ISSUES, 1952–76

Foreign policy crises influenced five of the last seven presidential races. "As we come down to the wire," Richard Nixon told volunteers in the last minutes of the 1968 campaign, "I think the issue you should emphasize in your final telephone calls is the issue of peace."

paign only on domestic issues, they'll beat us—our hope is to keep it on foreign policy."

In 1960, Stratton was right, Nixon was wrong, but the evidence strongly suggests that—contrary to the belief of many observers—foreign policy has played a dominant role in five of the last seven presidential campaigns, and that it is likely to do so again in 1980. One need mention only Israel, the Middle East, and imported oil for the gas pumps of all America.

The claim for foreign policy as a cutting-edge issue in American electoral politics, however, must be tempered by three observations:

(*a*) We have not witnessed serious, responsible debate on foreign policy during the presidential campaigns;

(*b*) The American voter is not particularly knowledgeable about foreign policy issues;

(*c*) The electorate's interest in foreign policy generally does not go beyond a basic desire for peace.*

*Remember the Democrats' prime re-election slogan for President Woodrow Wilson in 1916: "He kept us out of war." A month after his inauguration, of course, Wilson asked for a declaration of war against the Kaiser's Germany, and America entered World War I.

Within this framework, a look at the last seven presidential campaigns is instructive:

1952: The victorious Republicans, with Dwight Eisenhower as their candidate, ran a sort of three "C's" campaign—"Korea, Communism, and Corruption"—against the Democrats, with communism proving to be the least potent. Poll data for that election year showed the Korean war looming as the nation's No. 1 problem for an increasing proportion of Americans—growing from one-fourth of those polled (January) to one-third (September) to over one-half (late October). On October 24 in Detroit, Eisenhower delivered his "I shall go to Korea" speech—the most politically skillful foreign policy pronouncement in recent U.S. history.

1956: In the rematch between Eisenhower and Adlai Stevenson, the Republicans changed their alliteration to "Peace, Prosperity, and Progress." If Eisenhower's most important statement of 1952 had been "I shall go to Korea," four years later it was "Ladies and gentlemen, I feel fine." Besides the question of the 66-year-old President's health, the issue causing sharpest disagreement was nuclear testing (to be discussed below). The campaign was complicated by the Hungarian uprising and the Israeli-French-English invasion of Egypt in late October, at which time Vice President Nixon stated the case for his ticket: "This is not the moment to replace the greatest Commander in Chief America has ever had. . . ."

1960: Although questions of foreign relations were much discussed—Cuba, Taiwan, missile gaps, U.S. prestige abroad—essentially the campaign revolved around "a Catholic in the White House?" and a general mood. "I have premised my campaign for the Presidency," said John F. Kennedy, "on the simple assumption that the American people are uneasy at the present drift in our national course . . . and that they have the will and the strength to start the United States moving again." Nixon, on the other hand, "pointed with pride to an eight-year record of

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unparalleled national growth . . . But at the same time . . . warned against smugness or complacency." In sum, thought Theodore H. White, "specifics and issues had all but ceased to matter; only 'style' was important."

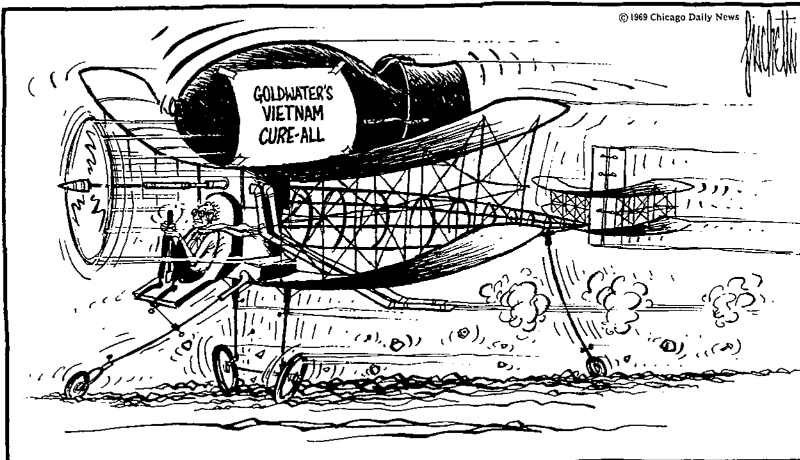
1964: The tone of the campaign was set by a Democratic television commercial, aired only once, in which a little girl plucked daisy petals while a doomsday voice began a countdown, followed by a mushroom cloud and the voice of President Lyndon B. Johnson reminding listeners that "these are the stakes. . . ." The world-view of GOP candidate Barry Goldwater had been expressed in *The Conscience of a Conservative* (1960):"The Communist's aim is to conquer the world. . . . Unless you contemplate treason—your objective, like his, will be victory. Not 'peace,' but victory." As election day approached, Johnson rephrased the question that was on voters' minds: "Who do you want to be sittin' beside that hot line when the telephone goes ting-a-ling and the voice on the other end says 'Moscow calling'?"

"Peace With Honor"

1968: Vietnam dominated the election year. The Communists' surprise Tet offensive increased the incentive for Johnson to withdraw as a candidate. On the day of LBJ's withdrawal, March 31, Nixon was scheduled to go on radio with *his* Vietnam plan. (It called for pressure on Moscow: "Without Soviet military assistance, the North Vietnamese war machine would grind to a halt. . . .") The speech was never delivered. Instead Nixon backed off from specifics, declaring that once a presidential candidate "makes a statement indicating what he would settle for, he pulls the rug out from under the negotiators."

After a bitter split over Vietnam policy at their convention, the Democrats chose Vice President Hubert Humphrey. Some of his advisers recommended an open break with the Johnson policy on Vietnam. But in his Salt Lake City speech of September 30, the Vice President would only go as far as to announce his willingness "to stop the bombing of North Vietnam as an acceptable risk for peace. . . ." The President declared a bombing halt on October 31; however, the immediate refusal of the South Vietnamese to join peace talks left the American people confused and succeeded in neutralizing any potential advantage to the Democrats. Despite the Republicans' rhetorical drumbeat on "law-and-order," the polls showed Vietnam as the number one concern of the electorate.

Issues of war and peace can be decisive in presidential campaigns. In 1952 (above), Dwight D. Eisenhower's pledge to "go to Korea" helped boost him to victory. In 1964 (below), Barry Goldwater's "hawkish" attitude toward the Vietnam conflict frightened off many voters.



by John Fischetti. © 1969 Field Newspaper Syndicate.

1972: For a time, this came as close to a single-issue campaign as there has ever been, guaranteed by the nomination of Sen. George McGovern (D.-S.D.), whose rise from obscurity was entirely based on his passionate opposition to the Vietnam War. In contrast, seeking "peace with honor," President Nixon had mined Haiphong's harbor, bombed Hanoi, and invaded Cambodia.

Yet Nixon also had gone to China, held SALT talks with the Soviet Union, made progress in the Middle East, and withdrawn over 400,000 troops from Vietnam. Spurred perhaps by McGovern's fumbles in selecting a vice-presidential candidate, the voters' verdict was overwhelmingly to approve Nixon's handling of foreign affairs.

Italy, Ireland, Israel

1976: The campaign was centered around controversies, not issues. However, one of the controversies did concern foreign relations: Gerald Ford's statement in the second televised Carter-Ford debate, "I don't believe that the Poles consider themselves dominated by the Soviet Union." Among the other controversies were Jimmy Carter's language in a *Playboy* interview and a vulgar remark by Secretary of Agriculture Earl Butz. The burden of Watergate proved too great for Ford, an appointed President, and the voters narrowly chose a Democrat whose principal campaign theme was that he didn't have any Washington experience.

Clearly, in most of these elections foreign policy as an issue boiled down to who was most apt to get or keep us out of war: Highly technical questions, such as international finance, or even explosive situations that were unlikely to involve American troops were not the stuff on which electoral mandates were constructed.

Given, however, that the electorate has less interest in and less knowledge of foreign relations than of domestic affairs, it is clear that on those international issues that the voters do care about, they care very deeply indeed. As the classic American government textbook by Burns and Peltason* puts it: "Foreign policy issues . . . in contrast with domestic issues have less extensity and more intensity." Foreign policy becomes a dominant campaign issue only when it has reached the raw nerve of the electorate and is thus "domesticated."

*James MacGregor Burns and Jack Walter Peltason, *Government by the People*, 8th edition, Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1972, p. 442.

THE LAW OF THE WORST

How enlightening are discussions of issues during presidential campaigns? Stephen Hess considers that question in this excerpt drawn from his 1972 Foreign Policy *article,* "Foreign Policy and Presidential Campaigns":

It is Daniel P. Moynihan's widely shared opinion that "elections are rarely our finest hour." As an iron rule, issues in a political campaign are oversimplified, overdramatized, and overcatastrophized. Reasonable discussion, as Theodore White has written, may be "the dream of unblooded political scientists," but in practice there should be no expectation that presidential campaigns will be appropriate vehicles for objective, thorough, balanced review of public policy. While this applies to both domestic and international issues, the latter are made even more inscrutable by their complexities, secrecy restrictions, and the limited knowledge of most voters.

Thus it can be stated as a general law of campaigning: *All issues are badly handled; foreign policy issues are handled worst.*

The issue-ignorance of the electorate probably is the most thoroughly documented finding in research on voter behavior. University of Michigan scholars in 1964 found that 28 percent of those

American actions on issues of great importance, such as helping Indochina's boat people or fixing the world monetary situation, may affect almost no votes at all. They have not reached that raw nerve. On the other hand, U.S. policy vis-a-vis some countries has become so domesticated that both parties must play special themes on them at all times. The "three-I circuit"—Italy, Ireland, Israel—was long a standard itinerary for American politicians; and Israel, in particular, gets special attention in any presidential candidate's campaign rhetoric.

Candidates' appeals in the international realm are basic, even primitive: "I have said this before, but I shall say it again and again and again: Your boys are not going to be sent into any foreign wars" (Franklin D. Roosevelt, 1940). "If there must be a war there in Korea, let it be Asians against Asians . . ." (Dwight Eisenhower, 1952). "We are not about to send American boys 9 or 10,000 miles away from home to do what Asian boys ought to be doing to protect themselves" (Lyndon Johnson, 1964). Given two factors that have worked powerfully to keep foreign policy discussions out of election year debate, the quantity, if not the quality, of these debates has been noteworthy.

interviewed did not know there was a Communist regime in China. A majority (three out of five) of those who voted for Eugene McCarthy in the 1968 New Hampshire Democratic primary probably did not know that the Minnesota Senator was a "dove" since they viewed the Johnson administration as not hardline enough in Vietnam.

Still, as political scientist V. O. Key has pointed out, "voters are not fools." For example, in 1960, Nixon received 59 percent of the Negro vote in Atlanta; in 1964, Goldwater received less than 1 percent of that vote. Many of these voters may not have known the substance of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 or that Goldwater voted against it. But their massive vote shift suggests that they had a firm notion of which candidate would be most sympathetic to their interests and thus had used their ballots "rationally."

A rough estimate would be that a third of the voters make up their minds before the conventions, a third during the conventions, and a third during the campaign. Many U.S. presidential elections are close enough for the time between Labor Day and Election Day to make a difference in the outcome. During this period, the only voting determinants that the candidates can manipulate are "the issues" —what they choose to stand for or ignore. And it is here that the candidates have accented foreign policy.

First, there has been the underlying American belief that "politics stops at the water's edge," the pervasive notion that extreme partisanship is not only out of place in foreign affairs but also somehow almost un-American. Massive disillusionment with the 1965–73 Vietnam involvement has eroded this feeling, but most candidates still find it necessary to pay lip service to this lingering sentiment.

Second, issues tend to surface in American politics because of strong prompting from pressure groups, which traditionally are organized along occupational lines. Labor unions, the American Medical Association, and farm groups, for instance, may have positions on international relations, but these positions are not generally central to their purposes.

Ethnic groups, of course, often feel very strongly about U.S. policies abroad. Irish-Americans and German-Americans lobbied to prevent U.S. intervention in both World Wars. Predictable pressure has come from East European (anti-Soviet) and Jewish (pro-Israeli) groups and, more recently, from Greek (anti-Turk) and black (anti–South African) spokesmen. Yet on the scale of forces that weigh most heavily in the making of

presidential election issues, these are modest, although not inconsequential.

Strangely, perhaps, an important reason for the prominence of foreign policy in recent presidential politics is that it has most engaged those who by some mysterious process become labeled in the press as "potential presidential nominees." More of this breed have served on the Foreign Relations Committee, for example, than on any other single Senate committee.*

Eisenhower, of course, came from the military, but with assignments that heavily involved international diplomacy. Nixon's foreign relations experience went back to membership on the Herter Committee in the House of Representatives. McGovern had been Food for Peace director; his ultimate running mate, Sargent Shriver, had been Peace Corps director and U.S. Ambassador to France. Even many of the governors whose names have been in that magic circle of potential Presidents have had some foreign policy experience—Stevenson, Harriman, Rockefeller, and Scranton. And those governors without a background in foreign affairs usually have tried to simulate this experience through overseas trade missions and membership on such bodies as the Trilateral Commission, as did Jimmy Carter.

Adlai's Lost Cause

Moreover, foreign policy has occasionally become an issue in presidential campaigns because the candidates have wished it to be, because it was the area in which they were most interested. Take the case of Adlai Stevenson in 1956.

Well before the convention, Stevenson's advisers reached the conclusion, based on a detailed study of voter attitudes and public opinion polls, that the Democratic campaign should be waged on domestic policy. "Concentrating on domestic issues," wrote two members of the candidate's braintrust, Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., and Seymour Harris, "would renew the image of the Democratic party as the people's party, leading the nation out of depression and poverty."

The Stevenson offensive was to be called "The New America"—a phrase he used in accepting the nomination—and would emphasize such matters as education, medical care, civil rights, civil liberties, and the problems of children and the aged.

As the campaign progressed the candidate became increas-

*Howard Baker, Alben Barkley, Frank Church, Hubert Humphrey, John Kennedy, William Knowland, Eugene McCarthy, Edmund Muskie, and Stuart Symington. Henry Jackson, Lyndon Johnson, and Barry Goldwater were members of the Armed Services Committee.

by John Fischetti. © 1968 Field Newspaper Syndicate.

Vice President Hubert Humphrey was plagued in the 1968 campaign (above) by his association with President Johnson's Vietnam policy; with a "secret plan" to end the war, Richard Nixon narrowly won election. But as election day approached four years later (below), the war still raged on.

From MacNelly: The Pulitzer Prize Winning Cartoonist *by Jeffrey MacNelly. © 1972 by J. MacNelly. Used by permission of Crown Publishers, Inc.*

ingly restless with this strategy. By late October, he was telling audiences, "I want to talk with you about the most serious failure of the Republican administration. I mean its failure in conducting our foreign policy." And so "The New America" fell into disuse as Stevenson fought his lost cause over terrain on which he knew himself to be at a decided disadvantage but to which he seemed to be almost magnetically attracted.

The primary issue on which Stevenson challenged the President was the suspension of hydrogen bomb testing. The discussion was largely free of acrimony and innuendo; rarely has an American election produced two candidates so intolerant of demagoguery and political overkill. It is instructive as an example of how badly issues of such complexity are handled under the best of circumstances.

Stevenson changed his position in mid-passage. On April 21, he had said, "We should give prompt and earnest consideration to stopping further tests of the hydrogen bomb. . . ." By October 29, he was contending, "I have never proposed the prohibition of tests of other than large H-bombs." (Between the two statements was a distinction of some significance.) Eisenhower issued a 10-point statement on "the government's policies and actions with respect to the development and testing of nuclear weapons." Stevenson responded selectively to only half the points; Eisenhower responded not at all to some of Stevenson's arguments.

What Missile Gap?

In a narrow sense, the point at issue boiled down to Stevenson's contention that the United States should unilaterally stop the testing of large H-bombs and Eisenhower's contention that the United States should not. But more broadly, the contenders were off on different tracks. Stevenson's concern was with what his opponent called "the lesser matter of the testing of our nuclear weapons"; Eisenhower's concern was with the general question of disarmament: "The critical issue is not a matter of testing nuclear weapons," he said, "but of preventing their use in nuclear war."

The issue, the most important substantive one of the campaign, was simply never joined.

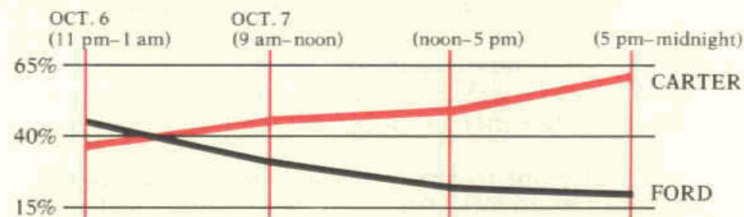
Questions of nuclear policy, as ventilated by Stevenson and Eisenhower in 1956, by Barry Goldwater in 1964, and by George Wallace's running mate, Curtis LeMay, in 1968, show how ill-suited are matters of high complexity and technical content for discussion in a presidential campaign. Two other questions,

THE REPERCUSSIONS OF A BLOOPER

"I don't believe that the Poles consider themselves dominated by the Soviet Union." So spoke President Gerald R. Ford on October 6, 1976, 25 minutes into his second debate with Democratic nominee Jimmy Carter. The seemingly trivial "blooper" became the most publicized foreign policy issue of the 1976 campaign. Interestingly, writes Frederick Steeper of the Detroit-based Market Research Corporation, "the general public did *not* know that Ford had made an error until they were told [so] by the media the next day."

Commissioned by the President Ford Committee, Market Research conducted a national survey of some 500 viewers beginning that night, with fresh soundings taken at various times the next day. Some 44 percent of viewers interviewed right after the debate thought Ford had done a "better job" than Carter (35 percent). By the next morning, however, Ford's 18 point lead became a 13 point disadvantage—probably the result of emphasis on the blooper in morning newspapers and TV news. The gap widened to 26 percent during the afternoon. The October 7 evening interviewing, which extended beyond the evening news, showed the largest change: 61 percent of those interviewed now thought Carter had "won" the debate.

Ford's blunder had a big impact on his campaign. The Republican nominee was put on the defensive, Steeper concludes, and "the two-month trend toward Ford . . . in the public polls came to a halt."



raised in 1960—the "missile gap" and Cuba—illustrate the problems of debating issues that are shrouded in official secrecy.

Following the successful Soviet missile tests of 1957, the matter of the relative missile production of the two superpowers moved in glacieresque fashion from Pentagon to Congress to campaign, gathering momentum year by year, while losing those rough edges of doubt, detail, and perspective that would have slowed its descent into political rhetoric.

By 1959, the issue had been expropriated from the generals by Senator Stuart Symington, a former Air Force Secretary, and, more important at the time, a potential Democratic candi-

date for President. The Senator charged that Soviet capabilities would shortly give them a three-to-one lead over the United States in ICBMs and that "the intelligence books had been juggled so that the budget books may be balanced." Eisenhower's Defense Secretary Thomas Gates responded that "there is no deterrent gap."

During the fall campaign against Nixon, Kennedy did not stress the "missile gap," although it was a part of his stump vocabulary: "The Republican party, the same party which gave us the missile gap . . ." (Minneapolis, October 1); "I have confidence in our ability to close the missile gap . . ." (St. Louis, October 2).

Less than a month after Kennedy's inauguration, Defense Secretary Robert S. McNamara, now privy to the appropriate classified documents, announced to a press conference that there was no missile gap, although his remarks were officially "not for attribution." By Thanksgiving, word was out that Kennedy too had formally buried the issue.

Playing Statesman

This explanation must have been cold comfort for Richard Nixon. In an analysis of 1956–60 voters who switched from one party to the other, Brookings' political scientist James Sundquist concluded that the second most helpful issue for the Democrats was the "missile gap" (after "unemployment").

The Cuban issue was raised by John Kennedy in a surprisingly militant statement on October 20, 1960:

> We must attempt to strengthen the non-Batista democratic anti-Castro forces in exile, and in Cuba itself, who offer eventual hope of overthrowing Castro. Thus far these fighters for freedom have had virtually no support from our government.

What Kennedy had proposed, in effect, was the covert CIA operation then in preparation, which would ultimately be transformed into the Bay of Pigs invasion. Nixon, who had been the project's advocate within high administration councils, thought that Kennedy had been briefed on the plans and, as he wrote later, was privately furious at his opponent for "jeopardizing the security of a United States foreign policy operation."

The day after Kennedy's statement the two candidates met for their final TV debate. When the question of the Cuba proposal was raised, Nixon attacked:

> "... If we were to follow that recommendation ... we would lose all of our friends in Latin America, we would probably be condemned in the United Nations, and we would not accomplish our objective.... It would be an open invitation for Mr. Khrushchev ... to come into Latin America and to engage us in what would be a civil war and possibly even worse than that."

Nixon was to explain later that this tack was the "only thing I could do. The covert operation had to be protected at all costs. I must not even suggest by implication that the United States was rendering aid to rebel forces in and out of Cuba. In fact, I must go to the other extreme: I must attack the Kennedy proposal to provide such aid as wrong and irresponsible because it would violate our treaty commitments."

Whether this was the "only thing" that Nixon could have done is a moot question. The point is that a responsible candidate will engage in what politicians call "honest lying" to maintain national security secrecy. But for voters who are prayerfully trying to weigh the merits of each issue, they must somehow factor in the possibility that what they are being told is not true.

Nixon's "dilemma" over Cuba suggests the liabilities of incumbency. Yet, on balance, the advantages of incumbency in dealing with foreign policy in a presidential campaign are substantially greater. At its most elemental, how does one measure

BOOKS: THE PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS

The origins of America's quadrennial presidential contests are traced by James S. Chase in **Emergence of the Presidential Nominating Convention, 1789–1832.** One of the best documentary studies is the four-volume **History of American Presidential Elections, 1789–1968,** edited by Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr. Individual campaigns have also inspired some good books. The drama of Abraham Lincoln's 1860 victory, which hastened the onset of the Civil War, is recorded by Reinhard H. Luthin in **The First Lincoln Campaign.** The biggest recent upset, Harry S Truman's 1948 win over Thomas E. Dewey, is chronicled by Irwin Ross in **The Loneliest Campaign**. Theodore H. White provides popular 1960–72 accounts of **The Making of the President.** Two excellent recent scholarly analyses are Nelson W. Polsby and Aaron Wildavsky's **Presidential Elections** and James W. Ceaser's **Presidential Selection**. Ceaser notes that, recently, each candidate has striven to attract a personal mass constituency; this "cult of the personality" and the increasing number of presidential primaries (at least 36 are scheduled for 1980) have severely weakened the link between President and party.

Oliphant, © *1979*, Washington Star. *Reprinted with permission of Los Angeles Times Syndicate.*

"Well, I expected some kind of reaction from Carter, but I didn't know he had this *sort of influence," was the caption on this Oliphant cartoon, which appeared at the height of the furor last year over a Soviet "combat brigade" in Cuba. Castro's Cuba is a hardy perennial in U.S. politics.*

the worth to President Franklin Roosevelt, the wartime Commander in Chief, of opening his 1944 campaign for re-election from the deck of a Navy destroyer, its guns as background, as thousands of shipyard workers lined the docks of Bremerton, Washington, and millions more listened over nationwide radio? Or what better exit line can one imagine than President Lyndon Johnson, after Khrushchev was ousted in the midst of the 1964 campaign, saying to reporters, "I'm sorry I can't stay around and talk with you—[Soviet] Ambassador Dobrynin is coming over to see me . . ."!*

To run against a President is to live in constant terror of being upstaged: Will unexpected world events, such as Khrushchev's fall from power in 1964, give the incumbent an opportunity to play "statesman" while all around him are merely "office-seekers"?

While the President has less than total control over the world situation, his opponent has none. Johnson's request for the Tonkin Gulf Resolution in August of 1964 boosted his rating on "handling Vietnam" in the Harris Poll from 42 percent to 72

*Of course, the timing of foreign crises is a matter of some importance. The Communist Tet offensive in Vietnam, coming in January of 1968, probably knocked Johnson out of the race. Would it have elected him if it had come in October? The existence of a volatile international situation during the fall campaign works to the advantage of the in-power party, as with the Suez and Hungary crises in 1956; a period of relative calm does not (1960).

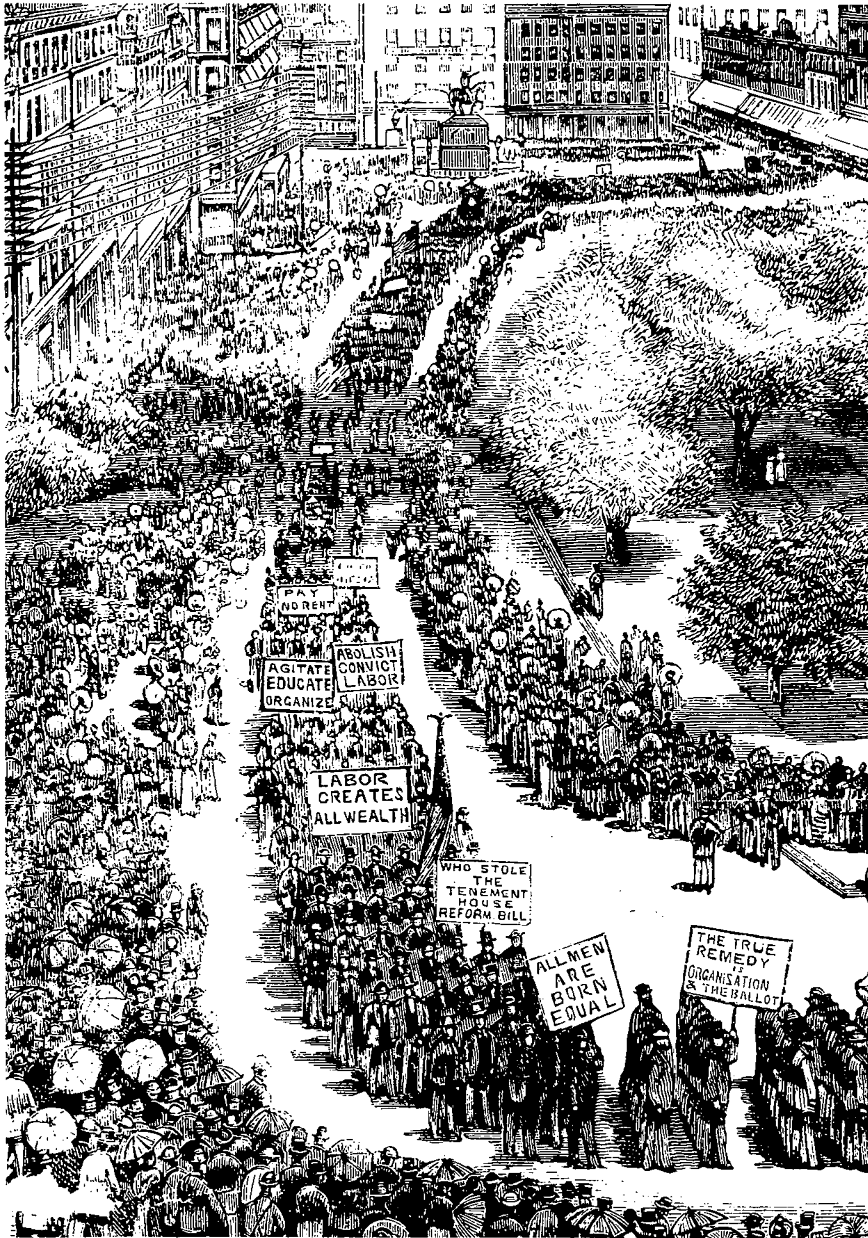
percent. After meeting with visiting Soviet Premier Alexei Kosygin in 1967, Johnson's popularity jumped 11 points, although a majority of those interviewed did not feel that the Glassboro (New Jersey) Summit "brought peace closer" and only 19 percent thought the meetings would help settle the Vietnam War. In the collective public mind, the President was aided by an action that was largely perceived as useless—at least he had done *something*.

There are no changes in the geography or the geometry of American politics to suggest that foreign policy issues are less likely to be raised in this year's presidential race—or that they will be handled more responsibly than in the past.

On the contrary. One development suggests that all issues —domestic and international—will be handled with more heat and less light. Political parties traditionally have represented so many different interests that each group has had to make compromises in order to remain within the party. The parties, in other words, long tended to mute intensity on any given issue. Thus, the steady decline of the parties has serious consequences. The current disarray of the Democratic Party, for instance, removes some of the pressure for consensus that has long held in balance the basic interests of organized labor, blacks, and Jews. Each group now has less incentive to act in tandem, as shown by the recent, unprecedented black-Jewish debate over the proper role of the Palestine Liberation Organization in Mideast peace efforts. The repercussions on foreign policy debate in 1980 could be considerable.

The irony, of course, is that the foreign policy promises the candidates make in 1980 will probably have little to do with the foreign policy crises that a President will actually confront in 1981–85. Judging from recent history, voters would be better served if candidates addressed such questions as: What would you do if the Soviet Union put offensive missiles in Cuba? How would you react if North Korea invaded South Korea? What would be your response if the East Germans built a new wall between East and West Berlin?

Unfortunately, contenders for the Presidency do not answer hypothetical questions. But if they did, it would be more interesting—and certainly more useful—than the way foreign policy is now debated in presidential campaigns.



From A Pictorial History of American Labor *by William Cahn. © 1972 by William Cahn. Used by permission of Crown Publishers, Inc.*

The first Labor Day parade, New York City, September 5, 1882