

News Focus:

Ike, JFK Enliven Drab Campaign

By CHARLES BARTLETT

WASHINGTON: A fuse has been lit in the relationship between the two biggest figures on the American scene, John F. Kennedy and Dwight D. Eisenhower. The explosion may or may not be avoided.

The emergence of Kennedy and Eisenhower as the most vivid figures in an election in which they are not candidates is a less striking development than the emergence of foreign policy as a serious bone of contention between them. The campaign could move from this point into a debate on their relative capacities as statesmen.

This is not devoutly wished by either man. They know better than anyone that the intricacies of the Cold War are not made easier by the harsh bite of partisanship.

The evolution of the contretemps is easily traced. Eisenhower has prided himself on a reluctance to engage the new President on issues arising from his conduct of the Cold War and on the fact that his reticence has extended even to the obvious boggle at the Bay of Pigs.

As Republicans charted their strategy for the campaign, they implored the ex-President to throw his prestige behind a charge that Kennedy has not been decisive in dealing with the Russians. Eisenhower vehemently declined.

His famous temper began to rise, however, when Kennedy declared in a speech at Harrisburg on September 20 that the picture was "dreary" around the world when he took office and listed the problems he had found in Berlin, Laos, Viet Nam and The Congo. He went on to say, "The dark clouds were gathering in Latin America, which had been ignored for eight years, and the Communists had already taken over Cuba."

The resentment stirred in Ike by these remarks was brought to a boil when Kennedy later referred to Cuba as a problem he inherited. Eisenhower felt badly repaid for his efforts for unity on foreign policy.

His anger exploded last week in a campaign speech at Boston in which he referred to a "dreary foreign record of the past 21 months" which was "too sad to talk about," and replied to Kennedy's "extraordinary words about Latin America."

In thus arousing Eisenhower, Kennedy's experience parallels that of Harry Truman in 1952, who waged a lively campaign in behalf of Adlai Stevenson and infuriated the General to such a degree that Eisenhower would have no relations with him for six years.

The President has refrained from further assessments of the Eisenhower foreign policy record and is unlikely to rejoin the debate at the point where Eisenhower left it in Boston.

The President is aroused to the point of vowing to devote his life to a battle against Kennedy. It is not yet clear whether this instinct, avidly encouraged by party professionals, will dominate more cautious considerations. These include the prospect that his own stature will suffer along with Kennedy's and that both Administrations will be confronted with past mistakes in reviving the record on Cuba.

Therefore an uneasy truce may be maintained on foreign policy. But both men will continue to be central figures in the Congressional campaigns and to stress their disagreement on domestic matters.

Both men are exerting themselves with a cold knowledge that their words are unlikely to change any important number of minds. But they also know they are bringing life to a lack-luster campaign and thus helping significantly to bring out the votes in November.



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