

Washington: Johnson and Fulbright

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By JAMES RESTON

WASHINGTON, Jan. 25—The differences between President Johnson and the Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, J. W. Fulbright, toll quite a lot about the President's concept of his job.

This is not a personal feud. The President likes the Senator. Their families were close when the two men were in the Senate together. Their wives have been on the friendliest of terms throughout Mr. Johnson's stay in the White House, and when President Kennedy was looking for a Secretary of State in 1961, Mr. Johnson recommended Senator Fulbright for the post.

Friends and Enemies

In fact, the intimacy of the Johnson-Fulbright relationship in the past helps explain the present difficulties, for personal loyalty takes priority over personal conviction in Mr. Johnson's catalogue of political virtues. He can forgive his enemies, particularly when he thinks they are wrong—he's getting on fine these days with Senator Morse—but not his friends, especially if he fears they may be right.

There is a difference, too, in the President's attitude toward private and public criticism. No President of this century has

sought more private advice from more people than President Johnson, but public criticism of his policies from a friend is another matter.

Fulbright's Principle

Senator Fulbright, in contrast, has been extremely careful not to exploit personal associations with the President to press his own foreign policy views. He has stated his opinions when they were requested. But he has purposely not discussed with the President statements he was going to make in the Senate on foreign policy for the simple reason that he did not want to involve the President in his opinions.

Their difficulties started last year over precisely this point. Senator and Mrs. Fulbright spent a pleasant Sunday evening with President and Mrs. Johnson in the White House and a day or two later the Senator criticized the Administration's foreign policy.

The President simply could not understand the Senator's impersonal and detached view of the duty of a Chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee and acted as if he had been betrayed. Similarly, Mr. Johnson was irritated by the Senator's long critique in the Senate of the Administration's military and political actions in

the Dominican Republic crisis last September and has been fussing privately about Fulbright ever since.

What the President has done is to transfer to the White House the personal attitudes and political techniques he used as majority leader in the Senate cloakroom. He operated on Capitol Hill through a system of punishments and rewards and highly personal arrangements, and his system worked.

It worked again at the White House last year on domestic policy, but the foreign policy issues are proving too serious for personal manipulation. On questions of war and peace, the President's critics are not responding either to social blandishments or isolation.

This is especially true of Fulbright. He has consistently been critical of the influence of the Pentagon on the conduct of foreign policy.

The Pentagon Influence

In fact, one reason why he is speaking out now against a renewal of the bombing is his fear that the military chiefs will once again manage to prevail and persuade the President to increase the violence in the hope of recouping their losses. And this is precisely what irritates the President.

For, he apparently regards

this as pressure which may limit his options. This is a favorite thesis at the White House these days—that speculation on what the President may do somehow reduces his freedom of action, which is a polite way of asserting the President's right to do what he likes.

Also, the President, who is required by the Constitution to seek the advice of the Senate on foreign policy, and the Senator differ about what this means. When the President calls in the Congressional leaders, as he did tonight, and has the directors of the Central Intelligence Agency and the Pentagon tell them about the North Vietnamese sending new men and supplies to South Vietnam, he calls that "consultation." Actually, he is not "consulting" them, but "briefing" them. He is not mainly seeking their advice, but giving them his. Fulbright has gone all through this many times before and regards these White House sessions not as an equal discussion of the problem but as a sales talk in which the White House has all the advantage.

"I have the greatest respect and affection for the President," Senator Fulbright said today, and this is undoubtedly right, for their difference is not primarily of personality, but of principle and policy.