In The Nation
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The Political Effects of the Middle East Crisis

By ARTHUR KROCK

WASHINGTON, Oct. 31 — The American citizen who will be inaugurated next January as President of the United States will be faced with decisions graver than ever confronted our Chief Magistrate because war has returned, and in the age of atomic weapons, as an instrument of national policy. These decisions, which can only begin to be formulated in the remainder of President Eisenhower's current term, will be precipitated by the uprisings in the Soviet satellite states and today's British-French act of war against Egypt.

The certainty that the next President will have to bear this shattering responsibility makes it inevitable that this will be one of the prime considerations of those who vote at the polls Nov. 6. Whether or not it will overshadow all the other factors in the political debate between the President and Adlai E. Stevenson, it is sure to be high in the minds of the voters. And they will cast their ballots in the last echoes of the Democratic charge that the Administration has great culpability for the Middle East explosion and deserves no credit at all for the civil and armed demonstrations in Eastern Europe.

In the Balance

The politicians, therefore, are asking one another what will be the effect of these dynamic events on the choice of the voters for President and the members of the next Congress. (This starts with the assumption that the pollsters are right in reporting that the President has a long lead over Stevenson.). The answer will be determined by the respective weights of the following political assets and liabilities of the President as registered on the scales of the international situation that suddenly and violently has become perilous:

The Assets. First among these is the great advantage of incumbency which enables the President to act and speak with the authority of the United States, while his opponent can only denounce, oppose and propose. Next is the potential of the President's great military experience, which was crowned with victory, at a time when armed force is again being resorted to for the settlement of disputes among nations and peoples. A third is his prominence as a world statesman whose devotion to the attainment of a durable peace is accepted everywhere. A fourth is his stand, though it proved unsuccessful, against the use of armed force by Great Britain, France and Israel in the Suez dispute with Egypt. Other assets are (5) the ever-mounting strength of the American industrial and fiscal economy during his term that is indispensable to the defense of this country and the free world; and (6) the fortuitous circumstance that his rejection of Stevenson's suggestions touching H-bomb tests and the military draft was quickly followed by armed violence abroad.

The Liabilities. First, the greater than usual physiological possibility that the Vice President may be President in the course of the next four years if Eisenhower is re-elected. Next is the incontrovertible fact that at this point in the President's conduct of foreign affairs the United States and Soviet Russia are allied in the United Nations against Great Britain, France and Israel on the initial procedure in dealing with the Suez crisis. A third, which is part of the second, is that his Secretary of State, on whom the President has heavily relied, is blamed in every Allied capital, and in Israel and Egypt as well, for the deterioration of the Middle East situation. These charges, though made mostly in private, are that Secretary Dulles has been shifting, hesitant and even disingenuous in his dealing with other nations. And the fact that these Governments center their attack on Dulles instead of the President is argued as proof of Stevenson's charge that Eisenhower is not "in charge of the store."

A Damaged Claim

Another liability of the President is that the Administration's claim it has effected both "peace" and "prosperity" in the United States has implied that its contribution of "peace" was global. This implication was demolished by the British-French air and naval bombing within Egypt and the invasion of Egypt by the troops of Israel.

No man can establish as a fact that he will live another four years, and at his age and in view of his medical history this is particularly true of the President. Hence the weight of that liability, whatever it is, cannot be canceled. But he can, as he did tonight and will tomorrow night, make a case against the critics of his foreign policy and of Secretary Dulles. Also, there is plenty of evidence that he is "in charge of the store," so that the issue raised by Stevenson is merely one of management. The President cannot, of course, keep or bring back the support of voters who believe either that the United States should back Israel regardless of any of its acts or policies or that the provocations by which Israel justifies its invasion of Egypt render it guiltless of the charge of being the "aggressor."

He can, however, act and speak in the context of the power of the Presidency and his own unmatched prestige in the world. And this asset is probably the one by which the question of his succession as affected by the Suez crisis will be settled next Tuesday.

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