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A GREAT PRESIDENT – When Facing New Issues

President Kennedy was, in many respects, an enigma to his contemporaries, and he is likely to remain equally enigmatic to future historians. He was the youngest President ever elected—yet in spite of a certain youthful panache, his poitical style was on the whole curiously sedate. His personality was reserved and he found it difficult to express his emotions in public— yet he was a professional politician to his fingertips.

Like Roosevelt he was a man of great wealth who joined the liberal wing of his party out of conviction rather than inheritance—yet he never emulated the passion and drive of Roosevelt's liberalism or identified himself, in the way that Roosevelt did, with the aspirations of ordinary Americans. In the last report the cast of his mind was pragmatic, not ideological; and his liberalism, though sincere, was of the head, not of the heart.

John Fitzgerald Kennedy was born in Massachusetts in 1917. The history of his family could serve as a case study of the social revolution which has transformed the position of America's ethnic minorities during the past forty years. His maternal grandfather, John Fitzgerald ("Honey Fitz") was one of the leaders of the Boston Irish community, Mayor of Boston, and three times a Congressman. His father, Joseph Kennedy, was educated at Harvard, made a fortune in real estate and on the Stock Market and became Ambassador to Great Britain.

John Kennedy himself was educated at Choate School and Harvard; spent a brief time at the London School of Economics while his father was Ambassador; wrote a best-seller "Why England Slept"; and served with great courage and distinction in the US Navy. In 1946 he was elected to the House of Representa-

tives, for one of the poorest districts in Boston. In 1952 he was elected Democratic Senator for Massachusetts, defeating Senator Henry Cabot Lodge, Jr., in order to do so. In 1956 he was the Democratic candidate for the Vice-President; and it is clear that from then on he hoped and planned for the presidential nomination in 1960.

Hard campaign

He was elected Preisdent in November, 1960, after one of the hardest-fought campaigns in American history. His election would have been remarkable in any event, because of his youth. It was made doubly remarkabe because he was the first Roman Catholic to reach the White House. A Roman Catholic had been nominated only once before by one of the major parties; and Al Smith's defeat in 1928 had been widely (if not entirely accurately) attributed to his religion. The memory of 1928 was one of the chief obstacles in Kennedy's path to the Democratic nomination.

He surmounted it in the only way possible: by demonstrating, in primary elections all over the country, that he was the most popular candidate in his party. When the Democratic convention met in Los Angeles in July, Kennedy was only a few votes short of the nomination; and there was no real doubt that he would receive it. He won it on the first ballot.

The campaign that followed was fought on three acknowledged issues — the slack state of the American economy; the need for vigorous leadership in Washington to "get America moving again" and to rally the Western alliance; and the alleged inexperience of the Democratic candidate, in contrast to Vice-President Nixon's supposed political maturity. The unacknowledged issue was, of course, Kennedy's Roman Catholic faith.

How much the final result was affected by these issues is not clear. What is clear is that Kennedy was elected by one of the narrowest margins in American history. Vice-President Nixon actually carried 26 States to Kennedy's 23, and won 49 per cent of the popular vote as against Kennedy's 49.7 per cent.

The geographical pattern of the results was equally disturbing to a President who

would be called upon to represent the whole nation, at a time of great international tension. On the Pacific Coast, in the Rocky Mountain States, and in the Mid-West, Nixon won a majority of the total votes cast. Only in the industrial North-east and in the traditionally Democratic stronghold of the confederacy was Kennedy clearly ahead. This was to have an important bearing on the President's strategy in office.

The domestic record of the first eighteen months of the Kennedy Administration was a disappointment to most American liberals — though not, if the public opinion polls could be trusted, to the mass of the American people as a whole. In the Senate the President was supported by a liberal majority. In the House of Representatives, however, the liberal Democrats were in a minority. They faced a conservative majority made up of Republicans and Southern Democrats, working together against progressive legislation. In consequence, most of the domestic programme on which the President had campaigned during the election — medical care for the aged, increased federal aid to education, and housing — was badly mauled or defeated altogether.

Gave warning

In part, this was because the President's attention was, for much of the time, otherwise engaged. In his inaugural address, he gave the warning that the news might get worse before it got better. His warning turned out to be an understatement. As Roosevelt's first Administration was dominated by crisis at home, so Kennedy's was dominated by world crisis abroad.

The first, and perhaps the worst, of these crises was largely of American making. On April 17, 1961, the island of Cuba was invaded by a force of Cuban refugees, hostile to the pro-Communist regime of Dr. Castro. The invasion had been planned on American territory with the knowledge, and indeed the enthusiastic consent, of the American Administration. Short of giving the invaders American air cover, or reinforcing them with American troops, President Kennedy could hardly have made

his support of the invasion more obvious than it was. This, of course, was a breach of international law and a serious affront to the susceptibilities of the uncommitted nations.

Worse still, the moral and political losses incurred by supporting the invasion in the first place were not redressed by the gains that might have accrued from military success. If the invasion had succeeded the United States would have looked to the neutral world like a successful bully. In the event, she looked like a weak and unsuccessful one.

Liberal support

Cuba apart, however, Kennedy's foreign policy deserved — and on the whole received — the support of liberal opinion in his own country and in the rest of the world as well. His international aims can be considered under three heads. In the first place he had to hold the line against renewed Soviet pressure in Europe, and to prevent the NATO alliance from disintegrating under that pressure. Secondly, he showed more anxiety than any of his predecessors had done to reach agreements with the Soviet Union on disarmament and on banning nuclear tests — and if that proved impossible, he wished at least to minimize the dangers of accidental nuclear war, and of the escalation of a conventional war into a nuclear one, by changes in American defence policy. Finally, he realized the necessity for a more vigorous programme of aid to the undeveloped world, both in order to prevent the spread of communism and on moral grounds.

For a short time immediately after Kennedy's election it seemed that the new Administration might be able to reach agreement with the Soviet Union more easily than its predecessor had done. During the election campaign itself, international relations had been almost in abeyance. The fight of the U-2 and the collapse of the Summit conference in the summer of 1960 had led to a period of tension; but the Russians seemed to realize that there was little they could do, one way or the other, until the presidential elections were over in the United States.

Now that the elections were over they seemed inclined to believe that the new President (who had, after all, announced publicly that he would have been prepared to apologize for the U-2) would follow a substantially different policy from his predecessor; and accordingly they treated him at first with a certain wary cordiality

However, the honeymoon did not last long. In June, 1961, President Kennedy and Mr. Khrushchev met at Vienna, for an informal summit conference. The main subject of their discussions was Berlin. It quickly became clear that the positions of the two sides were as far apart as they had ever been. The Russians insisted that West Berlin must become a demilitarised "free city" and that East Germany must be recognized as a sovereign State. They threatened that if this were not done by international agreement they would sign a seperate peace with East Germany. They claimed that in that event Western rights in West Berlin would automatically lapse, and that the communications between West Berlin from West Germany would automatically come under East German control.

Sky darker

The Americans replied that Western rights in Berlin arose out of the Potsdam agreements of 1945 which could not be unilaterally abrogated by the Russians; that the status of West Berlin would therefore remain unchanged no matter what treaties the Russians chose to sign with their East German satellites; and that no agreement on the future of Germany would be acceptable to the West unless it promised to unite the country in peace and freedom.

For the rest of the summer the international sky grew steadily darker. Khrushchev launched a war of nerves of the kind Hitler had employed in the thirties; Kennedy replied with an adroit mixture of firmness and conciliation. The Russians renewed their threat to sign a separate peace with East Germany and boasted of the size of their rocket arsenal. In August the crisis reached a still more acute stage. On August 13 the East Germans sealed off their sector from

the Western sectors of the the city and built a wall around West Berlin. In reply the Western garrison in Berlin was strengthened, Vice-President Johnson was dispatched on a visit to West Berlin to stiffen the morale of the Berliners, and for a whie American and East German troops glowered at each other across the sector border. At the end of the same month, the Russians announced that they would carry out a series of atmospheric nuclear tests, thus breaking the moratorium on such tests which had been in existence for three years.

To all this President Kennedy replied by making it clear that the West was prepared to fight, if necessary, for the liberties of the West Berliners and Western rights in the city. At the same time he took care to avoid making provocative gestures which might confront the Russians with a choice between losing face and making even more provocative gestures themselves. The line between appeasement and unnecessary firmness was an extremely delicate one; and Kennedy trod it with great skill.

In doubt

By October it was becoming clear that the crisis, though still menacing, no longer threatened to explode into physical fighting at a moment's notice. Meanwhile, both sides made tentative approaches to negotiation. The end of the West German election campaign on September 17 removed an element making for rigidity in the Western camp; and the end of the party Congress in Moscow in October did the same for the East.

In October there was a meeting between the Secretary of State, Mr. Dean Rusk, and Mr. Gromyko; and this was followed by a prolonged "probe" of Soviet intentions by the Americans. In the following eight months it looked as if Kennedy would be prepared to offer a limited degree of *de facto* recognition to East Germany in return for international control of the access routes between West Berlin and West Germany; but the precise details of an agreement remained in doubt. They were still in doubt by June, 1962.

In the first eighteen months of his Administra-

tion, at last, President Kennedy's disarmement policy had produced equally little in the way of tangible results. This was not, of course, his own fault. In 1961, with the Russians threatening to sign a separate peace with East Germany and ending the moratorium on nuclear tests, no progress was possible. In 1962 some progress was made, but it was still painfully slow. Another attempt was made to negotiate a controled ban on nuclear tests, but although the Americans were now willing to make more concessions than they had offered in the past, agreement seemed as far off as ever.

Cuban crisis

In the sphere of comprehensive disarmament the outlook was slightly more encouraging, perhaps because of the increasingly important part played by the neutrals.

These prospects were suddenly and brutally interrupted by the Soviet decision to install nuclear missiles in Cuba, only miles from the coast of Florida. For a few days at the end of October, 1962, the world approached nearer to the brink of thermonuclear war. President Kennedy heard what the Russians were doing on October 17. Rightly or wrongly he and his advisers believed that Soviet missiles in Cuba would tilt the strategic balance decisively against the West. They knew from their intelligence sources that the Russians were racing against time to make the missile pads operational; and they knew that once the launching pads were operational, the heartland of the American continent would be vulnerable as never before. It seemed clear that they had to act at once.

In 'quarantine'

On the night of October 22 President Kennedy announced that the United States had put Cuba into "quarantine." The "quarantine" would be enforced by the United States Navy; and all ships carrying offensive weapons to Cuba would be turned back. He also anounced that he had directed "continued and increased close surveillance of Cuba and its military build-up"; that the United States would regard any nuclear attack launched from Cuba against any nation in the Western

hemisphere as an attack on the United States. Finally, he called on Mr. Khrushchev to "halt and eliminate this clandestine, reckless and provocative threat to world peace."

The following day the Latin American countries decided to support the United States. On October 24 Mr. Khrushchev announced that the Soviet Union was ready for a summit meeting, and the US blockade went into effect. But the first crisis point was still to come. It was known that Soviet ships were on their way to Cuba. If they tried to break the American blockade, they would be fired upon. If they were fired on, war might result.

A new turn

On October 25 the first Soviet ship reached the American blockade. It was intercepted and allowed to proceed. Next day, the crisis took a new turn. The White House announced that development of Soviet missile sites in Cuba was still continuing at "a rapid pace"; and the State Department added that if offensive preparations in Cuba were to continue "further action" would be justified. This was the second major crisis point. Mr. Khrushchev had been warned that the Russian missiles must be removed, and so far he had not done so. Soon President Kennedy would have to act: by pinpoint bombing of the sites, by a parachute assault, by a massive invasion of Cuba or by a nuclear strike against the bases. On October 28 Mr. Khrushchev finally saw the folly of persisting, and announced that the Soviet missiles bases in Cuba would be dismantled. Anxious moments were still to come, but the crisis was over.

Edge of catastrophe

Firmness coupled with caution had prevailed: and it is clear in retrospect that both elements were equally important. For President Kennedy had steadily refused to launch a surprise air strike against Cuba, as some of his advisers had suggested; he had made every possible effort to leave the Russians a chance to retreat without losing face. No one will ever know whether he was right about the magnitude of the threat the Soviet missiles seemed to represent. There

can be no doubt, however, that his handing of the threat showed statesmanship of a high order.

Over Cuba, one of President Kennedy's advisers said afterwards, they had felt in Washington as though they could be "within five minutes of destruction." Both Mr. Kennedy and no doubt Mr. Khrushchev as well realized that they had been to the edge of catastrophe; and both tried to withdraw from it as soon as they could. President Kennedy's part in this was notable. Cuba represented a victory for him and his country; but he steadily refused to boast about it, or to humiliate his opponent. Instead, he made every effort to reach a genuine understanding with the Russians.

International relations slowly took a turn for the better. In January 1963 "exploratory taks" were held in New York between Russia and the United States, in an atempt to establish a foundation for a ban on nuclear tests. Towards the end of the month Mr. Khrushchev suddenly announced that he was prepared to accept the principle of on-site inspection; and for a short time it looked as though a full-scale agreement might soon be reached.

But these hopes proved over-optimistic. Endless haggling took place over the exact number of on-site inspections to be allowed in a year. The West insisted on seven; the Russians stuck at three. By the summer it had become clear that the Russians were not prepared to accept any inspection, and that a full-scale ban was therefore impossible.

Then on June 10 President Kennedy made a last effort to break the deadlock. In a striking speech at the American University, he announced that the United States would not resume atmospheric tests so long as other countries also abstained. He called on his own countrymen "not to fall into the same trap as the Soviets, not to see only a distorted and desperate view of the other side, not to see conflict as inevitable." At the same time it was announced that a high-level conference would be held in Moscow in July to look for a way out of the impasse in which all previous

conferences had been bogged down.

The conference was successful; and by the end of the summer a treaty had been signed banning nuclear tests in the atmosphere, under the sea and in outer space.

World opinion

In itself, the test-ban treaty meant comparatively little. It contained no measures of inspection or control; and the only real sanction behind it was the pressure of world opinion. But in spite of its limitations as a disarmament treaty, it had immense significance for world politics. For the first time since the Cold War, the great nuclear powers had agreed to restirct their own freedom of action in the interests of world peace. At the least it was a step in the right direction. The danger of nuclear war still remained, and would remain. But it was now possible to hope for further steps to a geniune detente between East and West.

Paradoxically, the prospect of a relaxation of tension between East and West led to a renewal of tension within the Western Alliance. President de Gaulle was adamantly opposed to any detente with the Russians in the foreseeable future. It was an open secret that many West Germans were alarmed by the possibility that a detente with Russia might lead to some form of recognition for East Germany.

Apart from these fears, the Alliance grew increasingly divided by the thorny problems raised by its own nuclear arsenal. Britain insisted on retaining her own independent nuclear deterrent; and at Nassau at the end of 1962 President Kennedy was reluctantly persuaded to supply Polaris missiles to Britain, on certain conditions, when the British V-bomber force became obsolete. Meanwhile France was equally determined to become an independent nuclear power; and there seemed to be a real danger that West Germany would soon follow suit.

In January, 1963, President de Gaulle vetoed Britain's application to join the European Common Market — in terms which implied a fundamental hostility to American leadership in the Atlantic alliance. This was followed by a series of pinpricks culminating in a decision to

withdraw the French Atlantic fleet from its NATO assignment. In order to isolate France, and contain West Germany, President Kennedy put forward a proposal for a "mixed-manned" NATO nuclear force. The proposal was received with little enthusiasm. West Germany was eager to join the mixed-manned force; but the other allies were suspicious. Militarily the proposal had little value; its political benefits were at best dubious. At the time of President Kennedy's death, its fate was still in doubt. The only certainty was that the legitimate demands of the European allies for a voice in nuclear strategy would somehow have to be reconciled with NATO solidarity. Here President Kennedy's successor faces a major unsolved problem.

He faces another problem — almost as grave, and also unsolved — at home. In the summer of 1963 the American domestic scene was transformed by a massive revolt of the Negro community — North as well as South — against discrimination and inequality. In the first two years of its life, the Kennedy Administration had had a disappointing record in the field of civil rights. The promise of his election platform had not been fulfilled; the hopes of the Negro community — and of white liberals as well — had been disappointed.

But after the race riots in Alabama the Administration at last began to act, and it acted with courage and determination. A sweeping civil rights bill was placed before Congress, more-far-reaching in scope than anything which had ever been attempted in this century. More important still, President Kennedy -threw the weight of his office behind the civil rights movement in a way that neither he, nor his predecessors, had previously done. It is too soon to tell what the immediate future holds in store for the American Negro. What is certain is that President Kennedy in the end earned a distinguished place in the list of those who have tried to make the American dream a reality for the coloured tenth of the population.

Fulfilling promise

President Kennedy was the youngest President ever elect-

ed; and for the first half of his presidency he seemed to be feeling his way. Apart from the disaster of the Bay of Pigs his policies were thoughtful, judicious and sometimes even wise. But there was a curious lack of passion and urgency in the way he presented them to his countrymen. After the searing experience of Cuba, this changed.

On strictly political issues, the domestic performance of his Administration remained disappointing — less because of any faults of omission or commission on its part than because of stubborn conservative opposition in Congress and an apathetic public opinion. But on civil rights he had at last begun to fulfill the promise of his election campaign and on the supreme issues of peace and war, he had proved himself a great President.

THE PONTIFF'S HOPE

"We pray God that the sacrifice of John Kennedy may assist the cause promoted and defended by him for the liberty of peoples and peace in the world. . . . We deplore with all our heart this event. We express the hope that the death of this great statesman does not bring harm to the American people, but reinforces its moral and civil sense and strengthen its sentiments of nobility and concord." — Pope Paul.