Goldwater, LBJ and the bomb

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By QUENTIN CROMMELIN

The Atom Bomb has been hung on Barry Goldwater's neck, and the Democrats intend to see that it stays there. Aware of the emotional response to visions of mass thermonuclear incendiary the day after Goldwater's inauguration, the Democratic high command has hit at his nuclear stand harder than any other single campaign issue.

Television commercials have, by inference, made him appear as a monster or madman, a figure not unlike the mad general in "Dr. Strangelove," hell-bent on destroying civilization for the next millennium.

Olympian Johnson

At counterpart to this exaggerated portrayal of the Republican, President Johnson has talked of "peace," "responsibility," "restraint," "recklessness," and "rashness." He has never mentioned Goldwater by name, nor has he needed to.

The implication is pretty clear that "hip-shooting" Barry is not to be trusted with the nation's Nuc's. Why? Because the pretty little girl in the TV commercials will most surely be burned to a crisp if Lyndon isn't reelected, and besides everyone knows Barry Goldwater is "irresponsible," "reckless," and "rash" as demonstrated in his stand on nuclear control.

Debate Beginnings

The whole debate began back in October, 1963, when Sen. Goldwater rather innocently proposed that the Supreme NATO Commander, always an American general, have authority to order use of tactical, battlefield-sized nuclear weapons in an emergency without getting specific approval from the President.

Goldwater reasoned that delegation of such authority would not risk the loss of a war within the critical few hours' wait for a White House OK. He has said, "The NATO commander should not be required to wait while the White House calls a conference to decide whether these weapons should be used."

The Senator has also pointed out that a communications breakdown could leave the commander with no decision from Washington while binding him not to act on his own judgment.

Communications Breakdown?

McNamara and the Defense Department scoffers quickly denied that communications could conceivably break down. Goldwater replied that it was many hours after U. S. destroyers had fired on suspected PT Boats in the Tonkin Gulf before the Defense Department was aware of what happened.

The Senator's conversations with Sec. McNamara have also raged over what actually constitutes a tactical nuclear weapon. Goldwater has talked in terms of the .04 kiloton Davy Crockett, fired from a tripod by three soldiers, and he has indicated that there might be other, even smaller, still officially secret, back-packed nuclear weapons.

Not That Big

The Defense Department's response that the average nuclear weapon in Europe is about 100 kilotons has been, at least, quite misleading.

The average of a 100 kiloton bomb and a .001 kiloton bomb is a little over 50 kilotons. Of what practical significance is this average? Furthermore, is McNamara's figure an average of types or of individual weapons?

Throughout the entire debate the administration has given the impression that exclusive control over the use of nuclear weapons by the President is spelled out in law.

AEC Act OK

But the Atomic Energy Act of 1946, as amended, says that he may direct the AEC to furnish nuclear materials or weapons to the Defense Department for such use as he considers necessary in the National Defense.

Clearly, the way is open for the President to delegate authority for giving the firing order. President Johnson has said, "The responsibility for the control of U.S. nuclear weapons rests solely with the President, who exercises the control of their use in all foreseeable circumstances."

But what is the true case now and what has been the case in the past concerning the President's role in nuclear control? Time and U.S. News & World Report have both reported that President Johnson, as did President Kennedy and Eisenhower before him, delegated the authority to fire nuclear weapons -- exactly as Sen. Goldwater suggested it be done.

Time reports that the NATO supreme commander has control in circumstances--"such as the incapacity of the President or the breakdown of communications between Europe and the U.S."

U.S. News said that "even now, the understanding is widespread among NATO allies that the U.S. commanders in Europe already have orders, issued in advance, to use nuclear weapons."

(Continued on Page 5)
in certain emergencies with no further instructions from Washington.”

Further, the N. Y. Times reported on Sept. 23 that it is widely assumed in Washington that authority to use nuclear weapons in specific situations for defense against attack has already been delegated to certain field commanders. The Times names the North American Air Defense Command as one such example.

Recklessness

Is Goldwater guilty of “recklessness” and “irresponsibility” in advocating current government policy? If so why doesn’t the Johnson Administration change? Or has Sen. Goldwater been the victim of the Big Lie? Obviously the Administration recognizes that in the nuclear question it has a volatile, emotional issue which, if handled astutely, can yield tremendous gains at the polls. The facts are another matter.