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Through this effective change in campaign tactic, it appears that Reagan has begun to seize the campaign momentum that had previously belonged to President Ford.

Nevertheless, it is our judgement that Ronald Reagan's apparent success using lengthy commercial messages does not hinge exclusively on the specifics of a defense argument. Rather, these messages capitalize on an existing perception of indecisive leadership with President Ford, and the lack of clear voter comprehension of current defense/foreign policy.

As such, a dramatic response and argument on the limited focus of national defense is insufficient...a continuing argument may even provide credibility to the charge while quietly recalling the existing impressions of indecisive leadership. Rather, we must assert a strong leadership stance by the President.

Recommended Message

The message must be that the American public is being misled by ambitious, irresponsible campaign rhetoric. The President must deliver a personal message to the American public...and communicate his saddened, somewhat righteous indignation with his challenger. Importantly, Ronald Reagan must not be mentioned or singled-out of the group of Presidential aspirants, but it must be implied that:

- . He is an irresponsible and ambitious man. He has sacrificed his principles for ambition.
- . He must be depicted as naive.
- . He would commit our young men to another "Vietnam war" in Africa or elsewhere.
- . His "eyeball-to-eyeball" diplomacy really means nuclear confrontation with the Soviet Union.

In a nutshell, we must go for the jugular and eliminate the credibility of the Reagan candidacy.

It is recommended that the President carryout this responsibility with a five-minute Presidential message to the American people from the Oval Office. The commercial will be aired one week before the May 1st Texas Primary. This timing will allow dramatic impact during the crucial days just prior to Election Day with sufficient time for non-paid media coverage and voter assimilation.



Discussion

1. The Texas Primary offers us the opportunity to cut the Reagan candidacy down once and for all. Ronald Reagan has the capacity to do a great deal of damage to the President's autumn election effort...and recent events indicate he will not be swayed by discussions of Republican Party unity. Clearly, Reagan believes his hard-hitting campaign against the President will enable him to gain the Republican nomination.

He must be stopped in Texas. A loss in Texas will most likely end his challenge...a win in Texas will most likely allow him to go into Kansas City via California with momentum.

2. The concept of jeopardizing Republican Party unity is not as valid as it once was. Rather, the message should be that irresponsible criticism, particularly without specific counter-proposals, can jeopardize the national interest.
3. President Ford should not attempt an itemized response to each criticism or allegation of candidate Reagan. It would demean the prestige of the Office and the President. In addition, it could begin an endless, no-win debate since some criticisms, particularly those relating to defense, do not have simple, obvious answers. The results could be increased publicity for Reagan contrasted against a spectre of over-reaction by the President.

Conversely, President Ford has a responsibility to correct false allegations that jeopardize the national interest and mislead both the American people and foreign governments. He has the obligation to draw the line between responsible criticism and irresponsible political opportunism, whether it relates to domestic policy or America's role as a world power.

4. We must respond promptly to the Reagan attack on a national basis prior to the Texas Primary simply because an unusually strong response by President Ford will be too late in the California Primary -- the impression of a hard-hitting Ford campaign in California would be one of a last-ditch, desperate effort by the President. Clearly, Texas is the place for aggression and initiative.

Let's discuss this subject as soon as possible.

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