

## Campaign 1980

# Alexander Haig is off and running

In what many observers regard as the first campaign speech of his as yet undeclared bid for the presidency, General Alexander Haig kicked off a projected national speaking tour with a highly publicized appearance at Philadelphia Independence Day celebrations.

In a keynote address to a Fourth of July event sponsored by the Sons of the Revolution, Haig, who retired as NATO Commander-in-Chief June 30, set the tone for his candidacy with a diatribe against the Soviet Union. Haig accused the USSR, among other crimes, of sponsoring "international terrorism" and of creating a "climate of violence" through its support of national liberation movements.

Haig reiterated his frequent demand that the United States and Western Europe develop a "post-Vietnam leadership that will not recoil from confronting the Soviets"—a reference to himself—and called for a massive military buildup on the grounds that "whether we have SALT or not," the U.S. will remain militarily inferior to the Soviets unless the necessary "hardware" is developed.

Haig opened his remarks by hinting broadly that the Soviet Union had had a hand in the recent "terrorist assassination attempt" on his life. [See this issue's Facts Behind Terror, pg. 63]. In fact, Haig has been trying to get as much political mileage from the attack as possible; at official resignation ceremonies held in his honor July 3 in Washington, Haig revealed that he planned to maintain his bodyguards in anticipation of similar assassination tries in the future.

Yet even Haig's staunchest supporters are slyly implying that the "miraculous escape" which conveniently thrust the relative unknown into the limelight was just a big publicity stunt. As the *London Observer* remarked July 2: "General Alexander Haig could not contain a boyish grin when telling reporters of the terrorist attempt on his life. As he returns to the United States from Belgium this weekend, it could not have got his ambush on the Presidency off to a better start." And Haig himself smilingly told reporters this week that his old friend Henry Kissinger had telephoned him following the incident and said: "Al, now I know you're a political candidate."

Haig's Philadelphia debut was marked by a rash of media coverage, including a laudatory cover story in the Philadelphia *Inquirer's* Sunday magazine July 1 and numerous radio and television interviews in the area press.

At the same time, the national Haig campaign apparatus, which has been chafing at the bit waiting for the pint-sized general's resignation, is stepping up its operations. A number of fundraisers are in the works, a letter-writing campaign boosting Haig's "presidential qualities" is being planned, and a media blitz is already in operation.

Haig himself has hired a New York public relations firm whose list of clients also includes Henry Kissinger, Ronald Reagan, and former British Prime Minister James Callaghan, to set up a series of speaking engagements for him across the country. Among the institutions that have so far signed up to hear Haig speak on "American Security" are Chase Manhattan Bank (whose chairman, David Rockefeller, is reportedly one of the retired general's biggest behind-the-scenes backers), the International Investors Conference, International Council of the Aerospace Industries, and the Executives' Club of Chicago.

In a move to erase some of the more unsavory aspects of his career, Haig is also reported to be writing a book on the "real story" of Watergate. Sources say the book will portray Haig as the "savior of the nation" during the final days of the Nixon administration, making a virtue out of the de facto cold coup d'etat which Haig, Kissinger and their cohorts mounted over the summer of 1974.

Rumors are circulating on Capitol Hill that Haig will be holding secret meetings with presidential hopeful Howard Baker, where he will offer the Senate Minority Leader the vice-presidential slot on the GOP ticket. Baker's announcement last week that he will vote against the SALT II treaty unless it is amended is being seen as an effort to fit himself into the Haig image.

—Kathleen Murphy