

Nixon: A Restless and Sleepless



By Harry Naltchayan—The Washington Post

President Nixon: a preference for flying at night.

By Lou Cannon

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He has always been a restless man, this President of the United States, and those who have seen him closely say that he is more restless than ever.

His aides remain loyal to Richard Nixon, or at least to the institutions of the presidency. But in their quiet moments some of these aides talk guardedly about his insomnia and about his preference for flying by night when he could more easily fly by day. They talk, too, of his penchant for retreating from the retreats he has chosen for himself and of his strange habit of changing the subject matter and of abruptly denouncing the "thems" he believes are out to destroy his presidency.

One symptom of this presidential restlessness is Mr. Nixon's present aversion to any detailed discussion of domestic policy. He has never been a man who suffers detail gladly, but he now refers almost all substantive domestic discus-

sions to his chief of staff, Alexander M. Haig.

When Budget Director Roy Ash arrived in San Clemente for an announced and important discussion with the President on the impending budget, Mr. Nixon turned the meeting over to Haig and never saw Ash at all. On most days the President saw only Haig, Press Secretary Ronald L. Ziegler, secretary Rose Mary Woods, his wife and daughter, Tricia, and the ever-present confidant, Bebe Rebozo.

Despite his disavowal of detail, the President made it clear that he was running the show. Though the White House has a long-standing agreement with the news services to inform them of presidential travel, Mr. Nixon gave strict orders that they were not to be informed of his many driving trips with Rebozo at the wheel. He also bluntly warned aides not to make predictive discussions of presidential policies for 1974.

One aide who had engaged in such a discussion subsequently corrected a

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newsman who had reported his prediction. The aide said he still felt the same way but added: "That's not what El Supremo thinks."

Mr. Nixon's restlessness is most troubling to the Secret Service, which doesn't care whether or not he notifies the press of his travels but is increasingly concerned about his personal safety.

One Secret Service agent, usually the most resolute of professionals, complains that the President's sudden whims to "drive somewhere, anywhere" make protection difficult.

This agent goes on to state another troubling aspect of Mr. Nixon's embattled presidency: When the President goes anywhere, the placards and the shouts of "crook, crook" are never far behind.

More and more, within the White House, there is talk of "The Scenario." These are the code words used to describe the method by which Mr. Nixon will leave office, as in the sentence: "I do not now see The Scenario for impeachment."

This last sentence and many like them vaguely accept the premise that Mr. Nixon may indeed leave office before his term finishes. No one will say how or when, but it has not escaped the attention of White House aides that Mr. Nixon says he will remain in office as long as he is "physically able."

There is no reason to suspect that his health is poor, and there has been no recurrence of pneumonia which forced him into the hospital for nine days last July. But Mr. Nixon abruptly canceled his annual physical examination in December, and he has not rescheduled it. The question is a daily staple at White House briefings, and it is always turned aside by spokesmen.

Those who have seen Mr. Nixon closely say that he was often temperamental and ill at ease during his recent 18-day stay in San Clemente but they blame it on the stormy, windy weather that plagued the trip.

Both White House aides and the reporters covering the President are as superstitious as ball players about the weather. It is a persistent belief in the presidential entourage that Mr. Nixon is hexed by stormy weather. The weekends in 1973 are recalled when the President was stormed on in San Clemente and in Key Biscayne while the alternative sites were enjoying the balmy weather.

It was no different the last time. The worst storm in a century and the highest tides in 300 years battered Mr. Nixon's oceanside villa for seven days. The skies cleared and the waters calmed when the President left in a motorcade for the greater isolation of the An-

nenberg estate in Palm desert.

But Mr. Nixon's problems are worse than the weather. Even in less troubled times he liked to play the piano in the middle of the night, and he has always possessed a restless, driven intelligence that makes sleep difficult. There is a persistent belief at the White House that sleep has become even more difficult. Mr. Nixon's Jetstar flight back to Washington was made in the middle of the night, although the plane had been waiting for him all day at Edwards Air Force Base. "What's the difference," said an aide. "He wasn't going to sleep anyway; he might as well not sleep on the plane."

Officially, all of the above is steadfastly denied. An aide who recalled that Mr. Nixon had said he would remain in office as long as physically able was pressed on the issue by a reporter. The President looked hale and hearty at his 61st birthday party, the reporter said. Do you really think there is anything wrong with him?

The aide shrugged, and permitted a long pause. "Of course not," he said. "There is nothing wrong with the President."

It is in the latter sense that some aides have substituted their loyalty to the presidency to their personal loyalty to Richard Nixon. The Committee for the Re-election of the President, with its institutional slogan of "Re-Elect the President", is finally gone but Mr. Nixon is rarely "Mr. Nixon" to the men who work for him. The incantation of the institution has a magic sound, a magic that does not as easily survive when the President is thought of as a man. There might just possi-

bly be something wrong with Mr. Nixon; all is well with the President.

All is not well. On the California trip the prevailing mood was that this was the last trip to San Clemente. The Laguna Beach press center is being torn down as part of a restaurant remodeling project; and those close to the remodeling say a new one will never be needed.

Aides talked about the way it once had been when President Nixon's administration seemed bright with promise. Others made jokes about "future President Ford."

Few are yet convinced that Mr. Nixon will resign. Many talk vaguely of him not finishing his term but are unwilling to speculate on the method of his removal. Some believe that the subject must never be discussed or the possibility of impeachment admitted.

Mr. Nixon can still be warm and even witty in person, as he was last month at a private party in Washington for his physician, Walter Tkach. He is still capable, aides say, of behaving like the self-styled "coolest man in the room" when he is discussing foreign policy with Henry Kissinger. But he is a man under pressure in the crucible of the White House. The picture painted by those close to him who are willing to talk about it is of a private person surrounded by adversaries. He is depicted as constantly restless and increasingly troubled.

"Anyone would be troubled, really, if he couldn't go out anywhere without attracting hostile pickets and impeachment signs," said one aide. "Nobody likes to hear himself called a crook least of all the President of the United States."