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A 'Dangerous, Futile Exercise'

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A while ago, this reporter offered the suggestion that the time had come for President Nixon to resign. It was an inherently meaningless suggestion because it came from a reporter. But it was also meaningless because the President is plainly never going to resign. By all the signs, he will only leave office if two thirds of the Senate votes to impeach him.

Another suggestion, also meaningless, is now in order. In brief, it is high time for the leaders of all factions of both parties, plus the much-involved leaders of the media, to conspire together to get the Watergate mess out of the way as soon as possible.

It does not matter whether the thing is done by impeachment or by impeachment's early failure. The rights and wrongs of the case do not matter all that much either. Only two things matter, and they both matter greatly.

First, the impeachment process is a mere exercise in futility—barring another unforeseen bombshell that will blow the President straight out of the water. What the House of Representatives does is of little consequence. Without another bombshell, there is not the remotest possibility of the needed 67 Senate votes to impeach Richard M. Nixon. So much is common knowledge.

Second, it is self-indulgent folly to prolong any exercise in futility that is also deadly dangerous. The longer the present exercise continues, the more deadly dangerous it will become. We have been warned in these last months.

This should be obvious. Anyone with much political common sense knows that the United States has a presidential system of government. You can see how deeply ingrained this is from the recent polls. These show under 30 per

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cent of the electorate with much remaining admiration for the President. But the polls show much less admiration for the Congress; and above all, they show a well justified conviction of the hopeless ineffectiveness of the Congress.

The U.S. government cannot operate effectively, in fact, without a fully operational President. No President can be halfway operational if he is 95 per cent preoccupied with defending himself, as President Nixon understandably is today. It is inconsequential whether you loathe the President or have high confidence in him. *If you value your own hide*, you should want the President to be operating with maximum efficiency nowadays.

These last months have warned that for perfectly practical, all too visible reasons, every single one of us can take a really hellacious hiding from quite possible, perfectly foreseeable events that only the government can cope with. At the moment, to begin with, every leading industrial-financial country in the non-Communist part of the world has a truly shocking inflation rate.

No such condition of inordinate, generalized inflation has ever prevailed for long, without leading to a resounding bust. Preferring Sir Galahad in the White House will later prove an excep-

tionally feeble remedy, if nothing has been done to prevent the bust.

To the problem of inflation, you must then add the problem of energy. An enormous, worldwide bust is also threatened, because none of the leading industrial-financial nations can possibly pay for their essential energy requirements at the new price levels. This problem is strikingly intractable, and it also interacts directly with the broader problem of inflation. One problem feeds upon the other, in fact.

To these horrendous economic problems, you must finally add the vast political and strategic problems that were half-revealed, half-dramatized by the Yom Kippur war. Quite aside from the peril of Israel and the anger of the Arabs, the war taught two lessons. The first lesson was that despite "detente," the Soviet leaders are still capable of extreme brutality. And the second lesson was that the Soviets are reaching out—and with a very sharp knife—toward the Persian Gulf oil resources that are the jugular of the West.

All the foregoing problems demand vigorous, carefully pondered, powerfully sustained presidential action. Anyone can see that no such action can be expected, as long as Washington continues in its present lunatic condition—wholly preoccupied with a break in a sewer-main, as it were, while a holocaust of flame races through the suburbs toward the inner city.

Remember, too, that in more than a quarter century, the Soviets have never once been able to resist getting rough, whenever the United States has looked weak. If you are willing to make all these calculations (and many people are unwilling), you will then see the logic of the suggestion offered above.