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The Irony of

Take any deeply somber event that ought to constitute a storm warning. In this town today, you can be certain that the event will then be thoroughly, even willfully misunderstood. This rule has been proven once again by the recent resignation of Paul H. Nitze from the U.S. team negotiating strategic arms limitation with the Soviets.

In his resignation statement, this brilliant veteran of the public service referred to the paralyzing influence of the Watergate mess. Nitze did so, however, in guarded, carefully general terms. Hence all and sundry instantaneously concluded that this was another "protest" resignation—a drawing aside of clean skirts from the prevailing dirty business.

In reality, however, Paul Nitze resigned solely because he now expects President Nixon to make a new SALT agreement in Moscow that will be dangerously favorable to the Soviets. As he told friends, he has always believed in speaking his piece and then leaving if he got no hearing. He had spoken his piece. He had got no hearing. So he left.

The reference to the Watergate mess in Paul Nitze's resignation therefore needs to be explained. Rightly or wrongly — and almost certainly rightly, alas!—Nitze is further convinced that the President wants to go dangerously too far in Moscow for two linked domestic-political reasons.

On the one hand, a squashy SALT agreement can hardly be attacked by the anti-Nixon leaders in U.S. politics today. These are in fact the men with chief responsibility for eroding America's defense posture. On the other hand, even a dangerous SALT agreement will give President Nixon "something to show" for his coming visit to Moscow, and will therefore let him pose as a peace-bringer when he desperately needs any advantage he can get.

The ironies of all this are considerable. Not very long ago, and again because of Watergate, President Nixon let Sen. Barry Goldwater and other ultra-conservative Republicans veto Nitze's transfer to a major post in the Defense Department. The President urgently needed those conservatives' support.

The conservatives vetoed Nitze on

Paul Nitze's Resignation



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the ludicrous ground that he was too soft, too little tough-minded in his assessments of the world situation and the American role. Now, however, Nitze has left the SALT negotiating team because he foresees that President Nixon is going to be too soft, too little tough-minded in Moscow, in order to make a domestic political gain.

Yet the ironies are the least part of the grim lesson taught by Nitze's resignation. It is known that the man to whom he spoke his piece before resigning was Secretary of State Henry A. Kissinger. So the question here is why the Secretary should allow the President to play games with this country's long term security for domestic political reasons.

The answer is that the Secretary is doing nothing of the sort, at least in the well-informed opinion of Paul

Nitze. That was the reason for the guarded language of Nitze's resignation statement, and also for his statement's applause for all those—meaning those like Secretary Kissinger—"who are continuing to maintain the orderly process of government."

If you examine Secretary Kissinger's motives, however, you again find that they are both deeply somber and totally misunderstood. In brief, the spectacle of seeming-weakness in Washington has always proved an irresistible temptation to the Kremlin. Whenever this country has looked weak, in other words, the Kremlin has always moved with great brutality to exploit the supposed advantage.

The Berlin blockade; the Korean war; the second Berlin crisis that was only liquidated in the confrontation over the Cuban missiles—these have

been the consequences when the Kremlin has yielded to such temptations in the past. Not unnaturally, Dr. Kissinger therefore fears the consequences of the spectacle of this city in the Watergate summer, with a U.S. government all by paralyzed.

Perfectly rationally, too, Dr. Kissinger is further convinced that the tougher Kremlin policy-makers would be greatly strengthened by U.S. withdrawal from the SALT negotiating-table. We have gone too far down that road to make breaking off the SALT talks anything but very risky.

In sum, Dr. Kissinger and Paul Nitze disagree on a subtle issue: whether it is a greater risk to break off SALT, or to accept a squashy agreement in order not to break off SALT. But here, once again, the Watergate mess enters in, like an all pervading poison gas.