

Joseph Alsop

The Case for Resignation: Inability

POST, FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 2, 1973

The time has come for President Nixon to offer his resignation, conditional upon prompt congressional confirmation of his chosen Vice President. The condition is needed, simply because it would be a gross constitutional impropriety to use the current mess to reverse the voters' verdict of less than 12 months ago.

This reporter has reached the foregoing conclusion with extreme reluctance. Yet it can be said on excellent authority that before the President's recent agonizing press conference, he played for a long time with precisely the same conclusions. Whatever else he may be, Richard M. Nixon is genuinely nation-minded. If he gave serious thought to the alternative of resignation, it was surely because he now senses that his ability to function has been impaired.

To give one illustration of the way the President has been crippled, there is the directive that he gave some time ago to Secretary of Defense James Schlesinger. The Secretary was asked to prepare contingency plans for a massive increase in U.S. defense investment. It was a wise and far-sighted presidential directive, as recent events have proved.

The Soviets, in Lenin's phrase, "probed by bayonets" in the Middle East last week, and they are still hinting they may do so again—for that deeply dangerous drama is not yet over. Lenin's rule about "probing by bayonets" was: "If steel is encountered, withdraw; if mush is encountered, continue." It is a thing the Soviets never do, moreover, unless they feel they are likely to encounter mush.

Inferior military power is the great mush-locator in Soviet eyes. Since 1965, we have first permitted the Soviets to draw even, and then, even more fecklessly, we have also permitted the Soviets to draw further and further ahead of the United States in military power. As has now been proven, this has created an acutely risky situation, which will not be corrected even if the Mideast settles down.

The President's directive to Secretary Schlesinger meant that he was thinking seriously about a strenuous effort to correct this risky situation. Yet anyone can see that an important defense increase sponsored by Richard M. Nixon no longer has a tinker's **chance in hell of getting through the Congress.**

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The country and the Congress would simply disbelieve the unpalatable facts, however loudly this President might proclaim them in arguing for a defense increase. This is only one illustration, moreover, of President Nixon's growing inability to function. There is hardly anything he can do any longer, that requires positive congressional approval. Thus, the great engine of the U.S. government, the presidency, has temporarily broken down.

In a way, this is an unjust state of affairs. Repeatedly, as when the Soviets threatened to intervene in the Mideast with their own troops, President Nixon has, in truth, functioned in a way that compels admiration. Furthermore, one has to ask oneself what would have happened to previous regimes in the White House if they had ever been subjected to a comparable inquisition.

This reporter has known three dif-

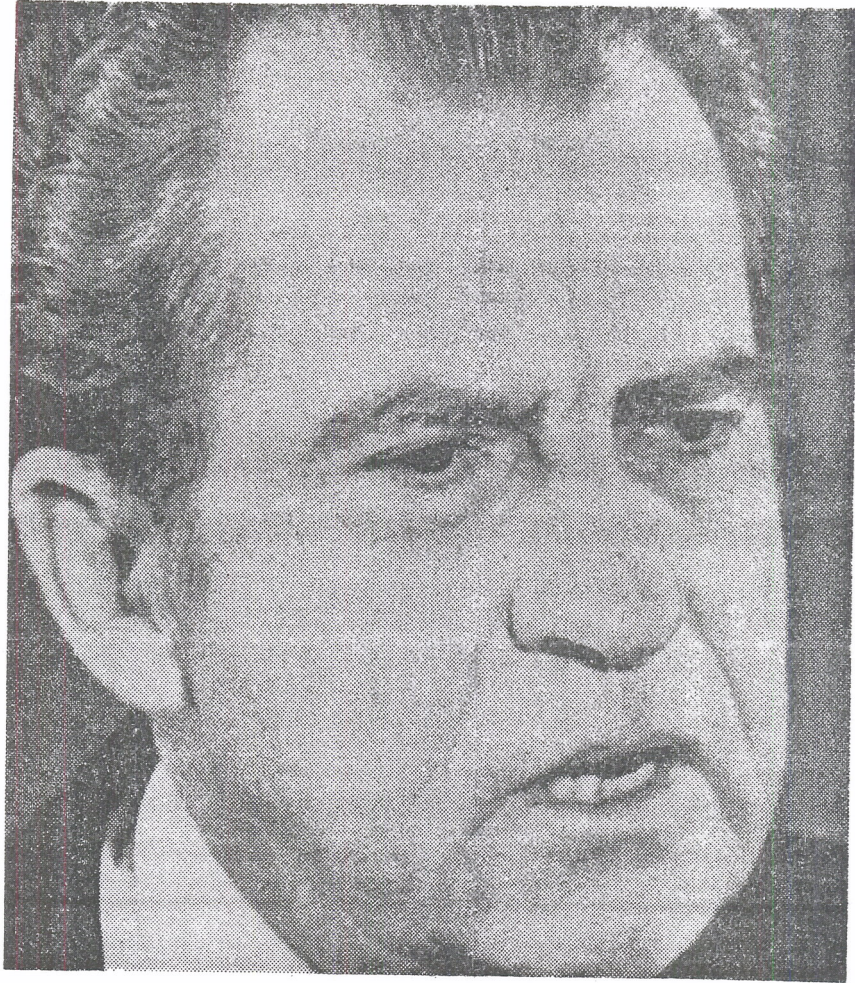
ferent White Houses in the range of very well to exceptionally intimately. They belonged, successively, to Franklin Roosevelt, John Kennedy and Lyndon Johnson. If these other White Houses had gone through what the Nixon White House has been put through, with informers climbing out the windows and floods of secret papers pouring out the doors, there is no room for doubt that impeachment cries would have been heard in the land.

This is an impossible picture, to be sure. One cannot imagine any denizen of the Kennedy White House, for instance, doing the kind of thing that was done by John W. Dean III. But the plain truth is that being the great engine of the U.S. government, the White House is the place in America where power most intensively centers. And power is even more dangerous than dynamite to have around in great quantities.

This does not mean that what may be called the anti-cover-up of the Watergate horror is to be regretted. Thank heaven for it, on the contrary. The system of management that prevailed in the former Nixon White House—the one destroyed by the anti-cover-up—in fact contained the seeds of great peril for the country. One has to speak of "the seeds" only, because the ways the system was used, for bugging Lawrence O'Brien's office, for example, were too ludicrously silly to be truly perilous.

Yet think of the peril of such a system being inherited intact by really tough and able men. In sum, by the people he chose and the system they built with his approval, the President has been brought to his present plight.

Los Angeles Times



By Harry Naltchayan—The Washington Post