

Joseph Kraft

'The Trouble Lies With Mr. Nixon's Friends'

How will it all end? is a question everybody has to ask about President Nixon as the returns from Watergate keep flooding in.

The ending could be happy if the President can shake loose from his friends, for his opponents clearly do not want to bring Mr. Nixon down.

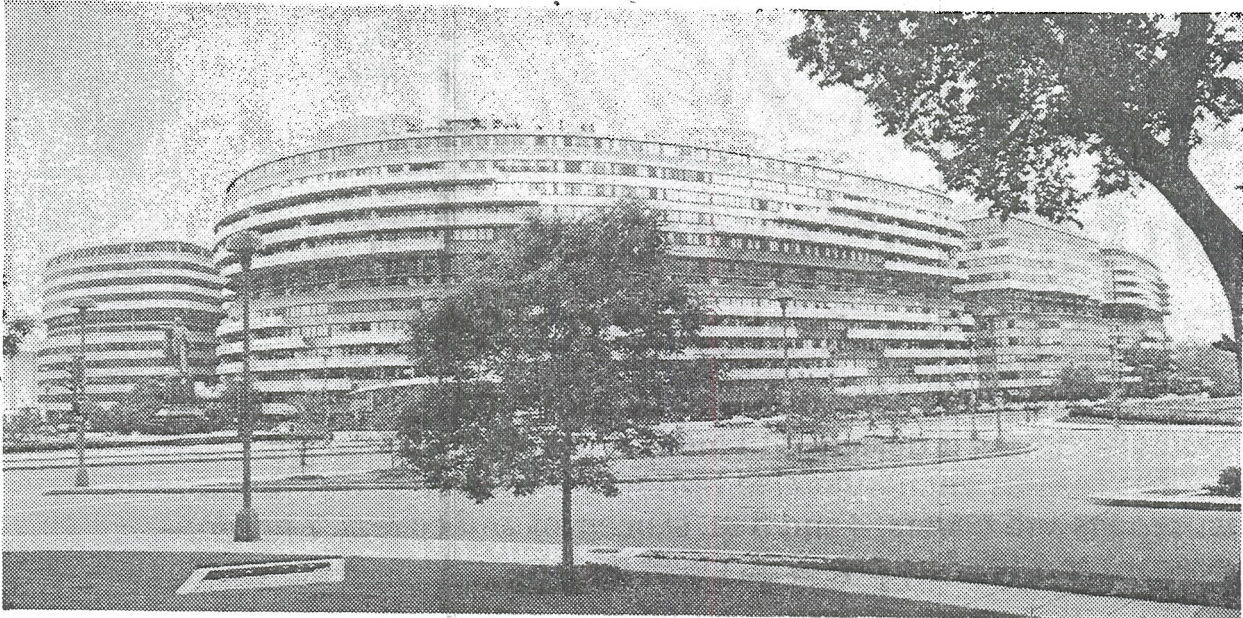
Witness his Democratic adversaries. Their interest is to use the present weakness of the President to advance their men, their programs and their chances in coming elections. But ousting Mr. Nixon from the White House would wipe clean the Watergate slate. The Republicans would go into the 1974 elections with the issue resolved. Mr. Agnew would start fresh, with a chance to build for sympathy that could gain him election in 1976.

A good index of the Democratic strategy in these circumstances comes from the confirmation hearings on the appointment of Elliot Richardson to be attorney general. The Democrats undoubtedly drew blood. They insulated Mr. Richardson from the Watergate investigation by obliging him to accept a special prosecutor, Archibald Cox, a professor at Harvard Law School. They showed he was less than candid in divulging information about when knowledge of the burglary attempt on Daniel Ellsberg's psychiatrist came to the notice of the President, and they could have gone much further in that vein.

But as the Senate Judiciary Committee considered further steps, Sen. Philip Hart (D-Mich.) observed: "When you add it all up, we're not going to get anybody better than Richardson from this administration." Chairman James Eastland reported that Richardson would not accept the job if the confirmation vote was narrow. So the committee approved the confirmation unanimously and pushed it through the full Senate by an overwhelming vote.

Given this responsible attitude on the part of adversaries, Mr. Nixon clearly could govern. He would have to take many more Democrats and liberal Republicans into his administration. He would have to free up lines of communications and remember that the world is a big wide and wonderful place. But, he could, on those conditions, have a considerable second term.

The trouble lies with the President's friends. His closest personal associates—former Attorney General John Mitchell and former White House aides H. R. Haldeman and John Ehrlichman—are not only implicated in sordid plots



By Harry Naltchayan—The Washington Post

The Watergate affair: "How will it all end?"

to obstruct justice. They did something far worse, something that made Watergate possible in the first place. They allowed the President to spin around him an atmosphere of dark suspicion about a liberal, academic, elitist plot to get the Nixon administration.

Now that same act is being repeated. The latest presidential statement on Watergate conveys the impression of a White House that is a beleaguered fortress claiming the right to commit all kinds of crimes in the name of national security. Mr. Nixon's speech to the Vietnam POWs expresses the same attitude.

An unmistakable sign of the climate is what has happened to Gen. Alexander Haig, the former deputy to Henry Kissinger and No. 2 man in the Army who went back to the White House from the Pentagon to take Mr. Halde- man's job as presidential chief of staff. It was expected that Haig would do a rapid clean-up job.

But Haig is not an officer practiced in command. He is a bureaucratic general who takes on the color of his surroundings. So he has been spending quite a lot of time recently justifying to newsmen the wiretapping done on

former White House staff members. In the process he has been blackening reputations and disclosing the contents of wiretaps—itself a violation of the law. And all that in the name of national security.

None of this is going to do the country any good. It deepens the shadow of Watergate. It makes it harder to get decent men into government. It assures continued political turmoil. And it moves Mr. Nixon deeper and deeper into a position that leaves open to him only the convulsive acts of a desperate man.

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