

Caper Comes to Crisis

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By Russell Baker

OBSERVER

WASHINGTON, April 23 — The news here is that President Nixon is facing another crisis. Its name is Watergate.

This is the moment when, according to his own account, he is at his best. When all about him are hot and panicky, the President has said, he is cool and calm. Afterwards when he has emerged from crisis into safety, he will experience terrible let-down, but now all his faculties are focused on the crisis and he is at the top of his form, perhaps even exhilarated by the challenge of battle with the chance it affords him to prove his mettle.

All this we know from his writings and interviews on the subject of Nixon and Crisis. Thus we can safely surmise that he is now weighing alternatives, applying his knowledge of human nature and politics to the great question: Which decisive act will most effectively dispel the crisis?

We cannot, of course, know the alternatives he is considering. But we do know his penchant for surprise, his football-enthusiast's belief in the crushing effectiveness of running the ball up the middle when the Democrats are deployed against the long pass. And so it is not too hard to guess at some of the more surprising courses of action he must be considering. Following are a few of these:

1. Saturation bombing of France.

Advantages: This would meet the White House need for headlines strong enough to push Watergate off the front pages. It would also strengthen the President's popularity with voters, whose support for him has historically risen whenever he has bombed.

Drawbacks: The President is fond of France; would hate to be hissed there on his next visit. Also, NATO treaty requires the United States to go to France's help in case of attack. This would put the President in the awkward position of having to bomb America.

2. Bombing South America.

Advantage: This would circumvent the awkward legal problem created by bombing France. Drawback: United States newspaper editors never put Latin-American news on page one.

3. Firing a lot of people.

Advantages: Presidents in trouble always score big with voters by firing men around them. This is because Americans believe Presidents are such good and sagacious men that if they get into trouble it can only be be-

cause bad men around them let them down or sold them out. Firing these men satisfies public yearning to believe in naiveté of Presidents and pleases newspaper editors who become grateful for lovable old easy headlines like "President Cleans House."

Drawbacks: President Nixon has not left himself anybody to fire. He has painstakingly built a Cabinet nobody has ever heard of and a White House staff designed to self-destruct under pressure. This doesn't leave anybody worth firing except David Eisenhower, General Thieu, Spiro Agnew and Billy Graham, who are not disposable.

The President could fire himself, of course, but that would mean he would have to go back to New York where he would constantly be running into Martha and John Mitchell.

4. Nationwide television address.

Advantages: Historically, whenever President Nixon has been in trouble and gone on nationwide TV to explain things, he has immediately been deluged by rising popularity polls.

Drawback: Watergate is so complicated that not even President Nixon could explain it in less than 24 hours and there isn't that much prime time.

Possible solution: Speak on an entirely different subject. Possibilities—denounce Jane Fonda, explain Earl Butz, blame Supreme Court for "Last Tango in Paris."

5. Shock enemies off balance by meeting issue head-on.

Advantage: Technique worked successfully in the 1952 Checkers-speech resolution of the secret-campaign fund crisis and script needs only slight revision. For example: President appears on TV with Mrs. Nixon and King Timahoe. All very close to tears. The President says yes, he did it, but it was a small, well-meaning wrong and he did it only to save America from a greater wrong—the election of Those Who.

The President then offers to resign if cards and letters from TV audience favor it. Audience's rejection will not hurt him too cruelly, he says, because he will still have King Timahoe.

Advantage: Americans will forgive a man anything if he seems to like dogs.

Drawbacks: This gives tough guys he will have to deal with later—Brezhnev, Pompidou, Chou En-lai—a chance to look good by pointing out that they don't have to lean on dogs.

6. Amnesty.