

Of Lists and Accusations

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The list of so-called Nixon political enemies and opponents made public during testimony of John Dean III before the Senate Watergate investigation this week recalled to mind immediately the old cops-and-robbers movies. In the Nixon White House, as in those wild kid thrillers, everybody was divided up into two categories: either a good guy or a bad guy. They were either for or against the hero.



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of them as enemies of the state — security risks.

This was a childish exercise, to say the least. Grown men, charged with running our complex government, should have more important things to do

—Turn to Page B2, Col. 7

—From Page 1

than make up lists of newsmen, public officials, senators, clergymen, businessmen and other private citizens against whom they plan reprisal.

I do not know whether President Nixon sanctioned the preparation of those lists or even knew of their existence.

The good Lord knows Nixon has plenty of reason to be mad at a lot of members of the news media, especially those who are vicious rather than informed in their constant criticism of his policies.

But you can't think much of a President's staff who put together rosters of private individuals because they have criticized the President, and label them enemies.

What the lists do is focus attention once again upon the basic cause of the whole Watergate scandal: the fact that the President had around him in the White House a number of assistants of narrow vision whose mentality and tactics were reminiscent of those of Nazi Germany's Gestapo and Soviet Russia's NKVD.

I am not willing, as are many of my colleagues in American journalism, to indict the President before he has had a chance to answer fully the accusations made against him by John Dean, Jeb Magruder, James McCord and others.

But I do think he is guilty of permitting his associates to spin a web of secrecy around him that prevented him from actually knowing what was happening in the government.

For more than a quarter century, I have known Dick Nixon as a personal friend, admired his talents and often supported his policies. But any President who closes himself behind office doors, listening only to the square-headed likes of John Ehrlichman and H. R. Haldeman, is bound to run into trouble.

There seems no question now that Dean, Ehrlichman,

Haldeman, John Mitchell, Charles Colson and numerous other close associates of the President were up to their necks in this cheap clumsy affair. Under the circumstances, it is a little hard to believe that the President did not have at least some inkling what was going on.

But the President deserves his day in court. When all the testimony is in, he should make his own documented reply to the charges against him.

IF WE HAD the British system, the President would have to stand up before Congress — as a prime minister does before Parliament — and subject himself to a rigorous questioning about every aspect of this case.

Since we do not have that system, the next best thing is the press conference. Had the President had regular press conferences over the past year, he would have had to face up to very pointed questions and inferences regarding the roles of his key lieutenants in the Watergate case.

He would have been forced by the nature of the questions of reporters to probe more deeply into what was happening and to realize that those around him were working on the principle that the end justifies the means.

I think I understand a little bit about Dick Nixon and his desire for privacy. By nature, he is not a hail-fellow-well-met.

Although I have seen him relaxed on occasion, enjoying his associates and surroundings, I feel often that he is forcing himself into situations where he must shake hands and pat backs.

Like one former President of our century, Herbert Hoover, and a defeated presidential nominee, Adlai Stevenson, Nixon finds it hard going when he must sacrifice his privacy for public gatherings.

He also has reason to be wary of those who would come to him willy-nilly offering advice and service.

Even as gregarious a fellow as Lyndon Johnson told me when I last saw him in October that a President had to be exceedingly selective in his friends and in those who are permitted to get close to him.

"Once you get in that oval office, you never know who is trying to use you or whom you can trust," said Johnson as we lounged beneath the giant live oak trees on his ranch three months before his death. In that context, he stoutly defended Nixon's friendship with Bebe Rebozo, because he felt Rebozo offered Nixon the kind of comfortable, relaxed relationship he was denied in the White House.

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THIS IS A PROBLEM for any President. I don't know of any corporation executive who must operate full time against a constant atmosphere of antagonism and negativism as does the President of the United States.

The President desperately needs those around him whom he can trust and in whom he has faith. But he must also be aware that his faith can be misplaced and he should never want or let those he trusts cut him off from the American people.

As I see it, this has been Nixon's big problem. He surrounded himself with non-professionals who shielded him too much and possibly agreed with him too much.

It was his responsibility to know what they were up to. For that negligence, he must be held responsible.

The nation will be anxiously waiting to hear his official reply to the charges that he was aware of the cover up of the Watergate crowd's misdoings.

Our President is a serious-minded, intensely patriotic man. For his sake and to restore respect to the office of the Presidency, I hope with all my heart that he can successfully convince the American people of his intellectual integrity and that he did tell the truth the last time he addressed them.