



By Harry Naltchayan—The Washington Post

"Without detente, we might have had a major conflict in the Middle East. With detente, we avoided it."

The Confrontation

Nixon Proclaims His Coolness In Hostile Session With Press

By Lou Cannon
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President Nixon proclaimed his coolness under pressure last night and then made it clear he is prepared for a long war with the nation's news media.

Bluntly answering questions which challenged his credibility and his emotional state, the President told television reporters he had no respect for their networks.

"I have never heard or seen such outrageous, vicious, distorted reporting in 27 years of public life," Mr. Nixon said in describing the television coverage of Watergate issues.

In one of his most hostile confrontations with the media since his famous "retirement" speech after his defeat for the California governorship in 1962, Mr. Nixon candidly expressed his own concern with the growing skepticism about his ability to govern. He blamed the media, and especially the television networks, for much of this concern.

This is the way the President said the media had described him, starting with the bombing of Cambodia: "Tyrant, dictator, he's lost his senses, he should be impeached."

When he was asked, in a paraphrase of his own words, whether the recent "shocks" had drained the nation of its energy, Mr. Nixon again denounced the news reporting during his administration.

"... When people are pounded night after night with that kind of frantic, hysterical reporting, it naturally shakes their confidence."

The most hostile moment came near the end of the 38-minute press conference when CBS correspondent Robert C. Pierpoint who, on Oct. 16, presented a special report about Mr. Nixon's close friend C. G. (Bebe)

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Rebozo, asked the reasons

for the President's denunciation of television.

"What is it about the television coverage of you in these past weeks and months that has so aroused your anger?" Pierpoint asked.

"Don't get the impression that you've aroused my anger," the President said to a gale of laughter.

"I'm very sorry, sir, but I have that impression," Pierpoint persisted.

"You see, one can only be angry with those he respects," the President said curtly, turning away for another question.

The President's rejoinder was greeted with moans and more laughter from the television area of the East Room, where Mr. Nixon was con-

ducting the 35th news conference of his administration.

But the President wasn't laughing. The quality of his controlled fury at the news conference—a fury which bubbled to the surface when his credibility was questioned—was reminiscent of the 1962 press conference where Mr. Nixon proclaimed:

"You won't have Nixon to kick around any more, because, gentlemen, this is my last press conference..."

The difference between that historic performance and the one last night is that Mr. Nixon now promised just the opposite of stepping aside. Time and time again, he cited his own conduct in the ongoing Middle East crisis as an example of why he should remain in office and not resign.

Speaking of himself in the third person, the President said:

"... Even in this week when many thought that the President was shell-shocked, unable to act, the President acted decisively in the interests of peace and in the interests of the country, and I can assure you that whatever shocks gentlemen of the press may have or others... these shocks will not affect me in doing my job."

Twice the President compared his domestic critics to his foreign adversaries, once almost jovially when he referred in his prepared remarks to "our attempts to get a cease-fire on the home front."

His second such reference was far more pointed, coming in response to a question about whether he should resign. On this occasion Mr. Nixon implicitly compared those who criticized him on Watergate and for firing Watergate Special Prosecutor Archibald Cox with his Indochina war critics.

"But I stuck it out and as a result of that we not only got our prisoners of war home, as I've often said, on their feet rather than on

their knees, but we brought peace to Vietnam..." Mr. Nixon said.

And, said Mr. Nixon, he intends to stick it out again.

When the President was asked by Jerry F. terHorst of the Detroit News how he was "bearing up emotionally under the stress of recent events," he spoke with a characteristic political touch of the quality "I guess I must have inherited it from my Midwestern mother and father."

That quality, in case Midwesterner terHorst had any doubt, was that "the tougher it gets, the cooler I get."

However, there was nothing cool about either the President or his questioner at the end of the news conference.

Clark R. Mollenhoff of the Des Moines Register and Tribune, a former Nixon employee and a frequent presidential critic, succeeded in getting the floor by outshouting several other reporters.

"You are so loud, I will have to take you," the President said with an expression of regret.

"I have to be, because you dodge my questions all the time," Mollenhoff replied.

"You had three last time," the President said.

After this colloquy the news conference ended with Mollenhoff shouting a question asking Mr. Nixon to "explain the rationale of a law-and-order administration covering up evidence—of high crime and misdemeanors."

Mr. Nixon, replying in kind, said that "perhaps all of the other reporters in the room are aware of the fact that we have waived executive privilege on all individuals in the administration. It has been the greatest waiver of executive privilege in the whole history of this nation."

While Mr. Nixon was citing this historic first, George Gallup Jr. was reporting another.

In an interview Gallup said that polling over the weekend of Oct. 19-22 showed for the first time that more people favor impeachment of the President than believe he is doing a good job in office.

The poll reflected the now-discarded compromise to let Sen. John Stennis (D-Miss.) hear the Watergate tape recordings. However, only 40 per cent of the polling came before the firing of Cox and none of it before Mr. Nixon agreed to hand over the tapes to a federal judge.

It showed that Mr. Nixon's popularity had fallen to a new alltime low, with only 29 per cent approving of the way he has done his job. At the same time, the percentage favoring his im-

peachment had grown to 31 per cent.

From the point of view of Mr. Nixon's threatened ability to govern, the steady growth of the impeachment column is the ominous sign. It stood at 19 per cent in late June, the first time that Gallup asked the question. It grew to 24 per cent in early July, to 25 per cent in early August, and then to 31 per cent in the latest poll.

Immediately after the news conference Gallup launched a telephone poll, the results of which will be available next Tuesday. This is the central question of his new poll: "Do you think that President Nixon should be impeached and compelled to leave the presidency, or not?"

While the pollsters and the press were asking impeachment questions, Nixon administration defenders were denouncing the conduct of the questioners. At a Republican fund-raising dinner in Indianapolis on Thursday night, GOP National Chairman George Bush denounced the "irresponsibility of the reporter who asked Secretary of State Henry A. Kissinger whether the mid-east crisis was an attempt to divert attention from Watergate."

Such a suggestion, Bush said, "demeans the presidency."

The same suggestion set off Mr. Nixon last night, although no one said it at his press conference. In response to a question by Dan Rather of CBS, the President said that some of the people "in your head office" thought that was "simply a blown-up excuse" instead of "a real crisis."

There were others, however, even in Mr. Nixon's own party, who did not regard the impeachment questions as unusual. Sen. Bob Dole of Kansas, one of Mr. Nixon's staunchest defenders and Bush's predecessor as GOP chairman, was asked yesterday morning whether Mr. Nixon could come back from an Oliver Quayle poll support figure of 22 per cent.

"Twenty per cent," responded Dole. "I haven't met any of them." When Dole was asked what the President had to do to make a come back, Dole said he didn't know and added: "If I knew, I'd call him."

Whatever it is the President has to do, Mr. Nixon appeared to be convinced last night that he won't come back on the strength of his media coverage. When the impeachment question first came up, Mr. Nixon said with a smile that, for once, was shared by his questioners:

"Well, I am glad we don't take the vote of this room."