

Editor's Report

SFXaminer

The hottest hot spot

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NEW YORK — Julie Nixon Eisenhower said the other day that there are some mornings her father is reluctant to get out of bed and face the day ahead. Even the bitterest critics of Richard Nixon should have felt a twinge of sympathy at this. Unlike themselves, the President of the United States has simply got to get up and meet his challenges.



W. R. Hearst Jr.

Even in ordinary times, getting out of bed in the morning has some times got to be tough for any man who holds what is conceded to be the world's toughest job. But today, with all the enormous routine headaches of running the country, President Nixon is beset as well not only by the continuing uproar over Watergate but by the truly critical need for peace in the Mideast.

There's not really much to add to what already has been said here about the seemingly endless

—Turn to Page 2B, Col. 7

—From Page

Watergate mess. On the negative side, Nixon once again has turned out to be his own worst enemy. The White House story about those two missing tapes may be true enough, but there is no question that its credibility merits all the suspicious challenges it has evoked.

There is no question, in fact, that a very great deal of the bubbling hot water engulfing the President from the Watergate sluices has been heated up by Nixon's own arbitrary and erratic actions. Instead of taking one position and sticking to it, he has encouraged his foes by all manner of ill-advised smoke screens and abrupt switches of position under pressure.

The tapes controversy is only the latest example of this stubborn misjudgment. The President had a perfectly good case when he was insisting that confidentiality of the tapes was imperative under constitutional mandate. The roof fell in when the issue was allowed to become confused with White House conviction that special prosecutor Archibald Cox was conducting a partisan probe of the Watergate scandals.

President Nixon overreacted abruptly when Cox objected to what in my mind was a reasonable compromise permitting Democratic Sen. John Stennis to hear and report on the tapes. The prosecutor was angrily fired followed by resignation of his two top superiors in the Justice Department, and Nixon became a storm center of public protest with Cox as hero and the President as villain.

There is tremendous irony here. Only a few days later Cox clearly demonstrated his anti-Nixon bias by confessing he was the likely source of a "leaked" newspaper story implicating the President in a major anti-trust suit settlement. He had given the explosive and confidential investigative material, he said, to Democratic Sens. Edward Kennedy and Philip Hart — two of Nixon's most outspoken critics.

The former Watergate prosecutor called his own action an "inexcusable" error of carelessness and begged forgiveness, but to me the White House was dead right in declaring that the leak by Cox "made clear his partisan attitude against the President."

Incredible to me is the obvious fury of the continuing attacks on our President, and incredible is the only word for it. Just think. Here we all are in a barrage of cries for impeachment or resignation, yet the essence of the whole case against Nixon rests on the word of one discredited man — former White House counsel John Dean, who is seeking to save his own neck.

More immediately important to this nation and the entire world are President Nixon's efforts to act as peacemaker in the latest and still-seething Mideast crisis. Many Americans, I fear, do not realize how much is at stake — or how much damage already has been done to the President's overriding ambition to achieve an era of negotiation rather than confrontation.

No matter how much success the President and Secretary of State Henry Kissinger may have in their current peace moves, the fourth war between the Israelis and the Arabs in 25 years has resulted in new global tensions whose effects will be manifest for years.

Russia, by joining the United States in a cease-fire call only when its Arab clients faced another disastrous defeat, has demonstrated that the widely-hailed spirit of detente is nothing but a Communist stratagem in its own national interests. It was Russian planning and encouragement, backed by unrestrained supplies of military equipment, which made the Yom Kippur war possible for the Arabs.

Because of Nixon's resolute action in risking another eyeball - to - eyeball showdown with the Kremlin, the Communists backed down in their desperate, last-ditch plan to rescue Arab forces with Russian troops. A likely global conflagration was avoided. But meanwhile U.S. plans for greatly expanded trade with the Soviet Union have been sidetracked, immediate further steps toward detente have been postponed and our warships have been sent to the Indian Ocean to counterbalance Russian naval power there.

But that's not the half of it. Even more serious, perhaps, is the fact that administration plans for a "Year of Europe" — a strengthening of our free world ties — have been exploded with the bombs and shells of the Mideast battlefronts.

NATO has been put to the most severe internal stress since its founding 24 years ago. By simultaneously refusing to back early U.S. peace moves and later angrily criticizing this nation for taking unilateral action, our European "allies" caused Kissinger to declare that he was so disgusted he scarcely cares what happens to NATO in the future.

Western Europe, basically, surrendered to the threats of an all-out Arab oil boycott. Being 80 percent dependent on such supplies, Europe chose to close its eyes on the latest Russian-backed attempt to wipe out the sole major bastion of democracy in the Middle East.

The fall - out from this has hardly begun. Not only is it bound to have the most profound influence on future Europe - U.S. relations, it also is bound to place severe new strains on the nine - nation European market. All these considerations are involved in the present administration peace moves.

These moves are of such extraordinary complexity and importance that I have decided to take off this week for Israel, where first hand information on what is going on is likely to be quicker and more reliable than any place else.

Joining me will be Kingsbury Smith, director of our European operations, an old and trusted friend and one of the top reporters of world affairs in American journalism. You will recall that he and I, together with the late, great editor and writer pal of ours, Frank Conniff, won the Pulitzer prize in 1956 for our exclusive and unprecedented interviews with Khrushchev and other top Russian leaders in the fields of politics, religion and art.

Implementing us in Israel will be two other chums — Johnny Harris, who has been covering there since the beginning of the war, and Serge Flegers, who has returned to cover his third Israeli - Arab skirmish, the last one of which left him severely wounded.

During the next week you should be hearing from all of us, so don't stray too far away.

Meanwhile, keep your fingers crossed in support of the plans and actions on the peace front by Henry Kissinger, our able secretary of state, and that man in the world's hottest hot spot today, Richard Nixon.