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Impeachment Is Not a National Disaster

The Presidency so dominates our thinking about the world that for many people impeachment portends disaster beyond measure. But analysis makes a liar of that fear.

The most important recent events show that peace and domestic tranquility do not depend at all on President Nixon. While the President's weakness has aggravated economic problems, even these could be vastly eased by the appointment of the right man to manage economic policy.

In the international area, the greatest potential trouble-maker is the Soviet Union. But the chief focus of Soviet animosity remains Communist China.

If only to isolate the Chinese, the Russians are eager to reach agreement with this country and Western Europe on arms control and trade. Perhaps the main reason Henry Kissinger has been able to negotiate a disengagement agreement between Syria and Israel, is that Moscow has not stood in the way.

The benign Soviet stance finds a counterpart in Western Europe. The new French President, Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, is noted for his disposition to cooperate with Washington. Harold Wilson and Helmut Schmidt, who have come to power in Britain and West Germany, lean heavily on the American tie. So for the first time since 1958, the United States does not

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have to count Europe as a potential source of trouble. With Russia and Western Europe not actively working against Washington, nothing very serious can happen to affect this country's international position.

As to domestic tranquility, the present moment provides a very good index. Graduation is usually marked by student demonstrations, and the onset of the summer tends to bring racial troubles.

But the campuses are notably calm. At one I visited last week, a dean remarked that four years ago he was meeting around the clock with students to prevent occupation of the buildings. This year, his chief encounter with the same students was in a softball game.

In the racial field, the shoot-out between the Symbionese Liberation Army and the police in Los Angeles is highly revealing. The far-out, eccentric character of the SLA demonstrates the limited appeal that vio-

lence has acquired for those interested in improving race relations.

The police, despite an unparalleled concentration of force in a black neighborhood, avoided hitting innocent persons by bullets, stray and not so stray. Local officials, in other words, have developed a sensitivity about community feelings, and that is perhaps the best of all possible safeguards against racial violence.

Unfortunately, the easing of international and internal tensions, has not been accompanied by success in managing the economy. The latest figures for the first quarter of this year show that inflation is bowling along at a rate of 11.5 per cent, while growth dropped at a rate of 6.3 per cent.

The meaning of those numbers is that efforts to restrain inflation could lead to a severe recession unless the economy is managed in a careful, discriminating way. But at present, economic policy is not so much being managed as fought over.

George Shultz, who used to manage the economy as Secretary of the Treasury, has gone, and Herbert Stein, who could manage it as chairman of the Council of Economic Advisers, is leaving. Rivalry to run the show has developed between Secretary of Treasury William Simon and the Director of the Bureau of the Budget, Roy Ash. Both men lack the broad experience in government and economic theory to do the job well. A third possibility, John Dunlop of the Cost of Living Council, who has the stuff to do the job, seems to have irritated the President's Chief of Staff, Alexander Haig, by the strength of his personality.

The result is that economic policy is now adrift. Even steps that could be taken to limit price increases in the construction and health fields are not being made. There is at least a chance that a round of catch-up wage increases could set in motion a new burst of inflation.

But these difficulties are avoidable. What is required is that the President appoint a coordinator of economic policy who has the breadth and toughness of Dr. Dunlop. The in-fighting would be moderated, and there could be developed a steady policy not subject to the interplay of personalities as advanced or rebuffed by the rapidly changing moods of the President and General Haig. The country would then be ready to live with the impeachment.

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