

Nixon's Refusal to Resign Upsets White House Aides

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Senior White House officials, stunned by President Nixon's admission of complicity in the Watergate coverup, are dismayed at his apparently steadfast refusal to resign, according to informed sources.

Mr. Nixon's principal deputies, including White House chief of staff Alexander M. Haig Jr., are thus moving toward independent assumption of day-to-day control of the executive branch, the sources said, while the President conducts what his aides regard as a hopeless struggle to remain in office.

The intense loyalty once extended to Richard Nixon by his White House staff, presidential aides reported yesterday has now shifted to the office of the presidency itself—and decisively away from its current occupant.

Sadness and pity, tempered sometimes by a sense of personal betrayal, are evident in the conversations now taking place in the executive mansion.

But two other attitudes, revealed in extensive interviews with members of the White House staff in the past 48 hours, seem more pervasive: uncertainty and a determination that the orderly process of government continue.

There are guarded statements and reluctant confirmations that the President is under great psychological strain.

"I don't mean to be alarmist," one source with first-hand knowledge said, "and it has to be said delicately, but the President will not listen to anyone, not really listen. . . . He's serene, I'd say serene, but not in touch with reality."

Privately, Haig has told high-level members of the White House staff that he perceives his mission as insuring that the decision-making requirements of the presidency be met in the absence of effective leadership by Mr. Nixon.

Following Haig's meeting

with members of the White House Staff, one presidential assistant observed: "We now have something more than a caretaker government, something less than government fully committed to Nixon as President."

In their conversations, presidential aides seemed particularly concerned about Mr. Nixon's apparent refusal to heed the counsel of some of his closest deputies that he should resign in order to save himself, if not the country, from what they regard as the agony of impeachment and trial by the Senate.

Even in the White House, it is difficult to find anyone who seriously believes the President would be acquitted by the Senate, according to these aides.

One source with access to the President said Mr. Nixon seems realistic about his chances and expects to be removed from office. "But he is willing to be humiliated by it," this source said. "It is almost as if he feels he has to be humiliated by it, to go down the road all the way."

Another White House aide, expressing the contrary view that the President is

not yet convinced his situation is hopeless, said there is dismay on the staff — but not resentment — about such an assessment by Mr. Nixon.

"He won't resign and we're accepting that," the aide said. "It's his decision and there is a great sympathy for his position . . . this is the man we've served and believed in for years."

Another White House aide cautioned that the situation could change at any given moment, and predicted that the President will be forced to resign in coming weeks as he "becomes more aware" of the full weight of public and congressional pressure.

Two high-level White House officials cautioned that additional information damaging to Mr. Nixon is contained in, at least one more of the 64 tape recordings that the President has agreed, under a Supreme Court order, to surrender to U.S. District Judge John J. Sirica and, voluntarily, to the U.S. Senate for an impeachment trial.

In addition, both officials spoke of "astonishing" things that have happened in the White House in the past several months, and one

said: "This last phase of the coverup will be an amazing story."

The two officials indicated that the so-called "last phase" began on July 24, the date of the unanimous Supreme Court decision ordering that the 64 tapes be surrendered.

The President, they said, argued with his senior aides that he should not comply with the court's order. ("He was the only one who considered defying the order," a presidential lawyer said.

Only after presidential

counsel James St. Clair had threatened to resign if Mr. Nixon refused to comply did the President agree to obey the court's order, the two officials said.