



The Opening Shot?

Patrick J. Buchanan

DESPITE his command performance Monday evening, President Ford, with his startling Cabinet shake-up, has again shortened the odds that he will be the first Republican President in memory to lose the nomination of his own party.

It is not so much what was done, as how it was done. Rather than the smooth, programmed transfer of power it was intended to be, Nelson Rockefeller's abdication and the dismissal of Secretary James Schlesinger and William Colby came with all the breath-taking suddenness and surprise of political events unfolding in downtown Lisbon.

The President may now have, in the defense and security agencies, men with whom he can comfortably work. But the impression in Washington is less of confidence strengthened than of confidence shaken.

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ROCKEFELLER'S departure from the Republican ticket was foreordained. The Vice President was prescient and wise to stand down, rather than endure an ignominious nine months of political sniping from the right and embarrassing inquiries from the national press.

But if his departure relieves one major headache for Mr. Ford, it creates others. Never long on party loyalty, the former Governor of New York now has some major scores to settle with the Republican right and

no reason for postponing their settlement.

With Rockefeller removed and with Mr. Ford moving rightward to combat former Governor Ronald Reagan, the incentive for Republican liberals to remain presidential loyalists is disappearing. Look for an open break between the White House and the Republican left on Capitol Hill.

Rockefeller's declination may be the Sarajevo of the GOP, the opening shot in a renewal of the conflict of '64 between the party's liberal and conservative wings.

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AS FOR Schlesinger's departure from Defense, that is a loss to the Cabinet and the country. Abrasive he may have been with the barons of Capitol Hill, but he is also a man of brilliance and integrity.

With him gone, skepticism over what America is trading away in the SALT negotiations is certain to grow. Should the President and Henry Kissinger come home with an arms agreement no better than the deal brokered at SALT I, all hell is going to break loose among the Jackson Democrats and Goldwater Republicans.

The imperative need now is for the President to get control of his government. Rightly or wrongly, the impression emergent is that of a President incapable of imposing discipline upon his unruly household.