

Unless a President is certifiably a traitor or an idiot, we have to assume he knows what he is doing

Richard—And the Elves

By ALLEN DRURY

WASHINGTON—After being around the White House for a while in connection with a book, I have news for the pouting panjandrums of the Righteous Right: their erstwhile hero, Richard Nixon, whom they have now abandoned with some fanfare, is still a perfectly decent and well-meaning man who deserves the same tolerance and the same chance as anybody else in trying to solve the problems of this complex and uneasy land.

The decision to abandon him (or "suspend support," as they put it), was announced with due solemnity by the Moody Elves of the Miffed Minority. It has had all the impact of a thunderclap in a cannon factory. Presumably it was intended to drive millions of sensible conservatives screaming into the night, leaving Poor Richard alone. Instead it would appear to have isolated the Moody Elves.

What is all this hysteria, anyway?

It is true that the President has gone rather far in some more "liberal" directions than some more "conservative" supporters would like to see him go. It is true that in his welfare programs he would appear to be appropriating many of the long-held positions of his Democratic opposition. It would appear further that in foreign affairs and national defense, he may now be taking risks that could conceivably turn black hair white.

But note this: they *are* risks and he knows it—and being Richard Nixon, he is perfectly capable of shifting strategies overnight if he decides his course is wrong or really dangerous.

Again, it is true that there appear to be occasions on which this supreme flexibility is used for political ends, specifically directed toward re-election in 1972. But on the whole this charge is really not so grave. The gravity would come if what he does really, seriously, irrevocably and beyond recall endangers the country to the point where it cannot recover.

There would appear to be little in the Nixon record to warrant this conclusion. All that appears is a great willingness to experiment. This may seem startling in conjunction with the image of the cool, calculating man

surrounded by such careful individuals with such careful charts and projections, but there it is. He's like that: something the country has learned as regards the economy, and something our opponents overseas might do well to keep in mind.

Therefore the hysterical reactions of the Miffed Minority seem premature. There's plenty to worry about in what he's up to, Lord knows—but isn't it a trifle early to be so positive about what it is?

He is, for instance, going to China, barring some slip-up in travel plans. It can be argued that in the sense of Oriental "face," he is going hat-in-hand as supplicant. But is he so stupid that he doesn't know this? Obviously he believes that, whatever the risks they are worth taking.

And if he fails and comes home to give us a Winston Churchill batten-down-the-hatches-things-are-tough-all-over speech, then he will at least have cleared the air and his service to America will be very great.

The same applies to national defense, an area in which, it is true, there are many disturbing trends that appear to be adding up to a steady and perhaps irreversible increase in Soviet advantage. But unless a President is certifiably a traitor or an idiot, we have to assume that he knows what he is doing and that he will not knowingly sacrifice the safety and security of the United States of America.

The point is: right here and now, we just don't know. It is still too early to tell. We do know that he is far from the villain pictured by his critics on the left; far from the perfect hero pictured by his idolators on the right; and certainly far from the rather sinister target of the Moody Elves.

He is, in fact, a human being who is doing the best he can, and doing so, we must presume, patriotically and as intelligently and diligently as he knows how. Unless we have absolute proof to the contrary, it seems a little early and a little ridiculous to abandon him.

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Rejoinder by William
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