



Congress in Mood For Confrontation

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THE 93rd CONGRESS convenes this week in an atmosphere of confrontation with President Nixon. Despite the curtailment of the Vietnam bombing, harsh issues are harshly drawn.

The only question is a question of guts. It is not clear whether the men pleased to call themselves leaders in the Senate and House are truly prepared to take responsibility for the strong actions that are now required.

Mr. Nixon is himself entirely to blame for the atmosphere of confrontation. In three areas he has initiated actions contemptuous of Congress and its leading figures.

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FIRST THERE WAS the escalation in Vietnam. The terror bombing of Hanoi and Haiphong not only brought death to hundreds of Vietnamese and caused terrible losses to American manpower and planes, it also involved the use of overwhelming military force for a non-military objective which nobody understands very well.

Even so, there was no consultation with Congress. To this day suspicion is that Mr. Nixon, far from achieving anything by his murderous tactics, only brought the negotiations back to where they were at the end of October.

Then there is the matter of impounding funds voted by Congress in the past session. At all times there has been some estoppel in the executive branch of some appropriations voted by Congress. But the past practice has been to impound only one or two highly controversial appropriations — and for clearly defined reasons.

Mr. Nixon has gone way beyond the

norm. For example, he has impounded funds for water purification which were passed by Congress over his veto. He has simply cut out a program for environmental protection in rural areas though the program is a dozen years old.

Finally there is the matter of executive privilege. That involves the right of the President to transact his decision-making in private. All recent presidents have invoked the privilege, and the rule of reason is that a small amount of executive privilege is surely necessary.

But Mr. Nixon has downgraded the Cabinet and other agencies of the executive to almost menial status. He has gathered all significant authority into the White House. Even so, when responsible officials are called by Congress, he regularly invokes the executive privilege against their testifying.

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THE MOOD OF Congress in the face of these provocations is angry. Mr. Nixon, unlike President Johnson before him, has no reservoir of affection on the hill. It is typical that in condemning the bombing Senator William Saxbe (Rep-Ohio) raised questions about the President's sanity.

There is not much doubt about what steps are required to curb the President. The way to assure peace is to cut off funds for the war. The right response to Mr. Nixon's indiscriminate impounding of funds is to cut off money for White House operations. As to executive privilege, the appropriate reaction is a tough investigation of the Watergate affair in which the President's political operatives showed so little respect for the privacy of other political leaders.