



# Laird Can't Do The Job All Alone

**Joseph Kraft**

MELVIN LAIRD owns such an array of shots that his appointment to the White House staff imparts a serious quality to what otherwise would have to be dismissed as a mere maneuver. If there is a single politician who can reverse the President's steady retreat from the force of Watergate, it is the former Defense Secretary.

Still Laird is a man with distinct limitations. He is a known political trickster. So if the President is as tarred with Watergate guilt as the signs indicate, even Laird cannot rebuild faith and confidence in the administration.

The first of Laird's many assets is his present position as the unquestioned top man in the presidential entourage. No one in the Nixon White House has ever had so much across-the-board clout as Laird. He is into politics, economics, national security and press relations.

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HENRY KISSINGER, while still the top foreign policy man, has been damaged by his part in an ugly wiretapping scandal. The balloon of his call for a new Atlantic partnership has been pricked, and the sound of escaping air rises with each successive summit meeting.

General Alexander Haig, who holds the largely political post of White House chief of staff, is a military man with only thin connections in the power centers of the private sector. Even his secure base in the military has been shaken. For Haig has had to resign his commission, at least in part because of pressure from the services against an overtly political general.

Apart from being undoubted No. 1 in the White House, Laird has many other

assets. He has wide access to leaders in business, the professions, politics and even the academic world across the country. He can be Mr. Wonderful in restaffing an administration which counts as one of its signal weaknesses an absence of talent in high places.

With the Congress in particular, Laird has the special standing of a former senior colleague. He is master of the Republicans in the House and he can be counted on to scotch quickly any pressure building up for impeachment.

Laird does not allow his mind to be clogged by doctrine. He is not partial to the rigid theories of free-market economics which, as applied by Treasury Secretary George Shultz and Herb Stein of the Council of Economic Advisers, have contributed so much to rampant inflation. With Laird at the White House, congressional and business pressure for tighter controls is bound to receive more favorable consideration.

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BUT LAIRD's suppleness is also his great weakness. He chops and changes at a great rate. Inconstancy is his guiding light. He can be for a Rockefeller one day and a Goldwater the next. Nor is he meticulous about the arguments he uses to press his case of the day.

Laird, in other words, is not a man of high principle, crystalline in his integrity. He cannot build faith which requires more than good works. So he cannot arrest the crumbling of the Nixon Administration unless the President himself can show that he is substantially guiltless of the monstrous implications which come flooding in daily from Watergate.