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A New Crisis for Nixon

**Although Agnew Inquiry Is Fresh Blow,
President's Comeback Is Held Possible**

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WASHINGTON, Aug. 7 — President Nixon, says a man with occasional access to the Oval Office, "feels as if he's living through six crises at once." The revelation that Vice President Agnew is under investigation for extortion, bribery and tax fraud in connection with Maryland building contracts seemed almost incredible to many politicians here coming as it did on the heels of so much other bad news for the Administration.

News
Analysis

Only six and a half months ago, Richard M. Nixon took the oath of office for his second term in a mood of euphoria. He stood on the brink of a peace agreement in Indochina; he had carried 49 of 50 states, something no other man had ever done; he seemed to have divined precisely the nation's mood.

Since then, the fortunes of the Nixon Administration have

been so disastrous that the Washington soothsayers have been forced to abandon the word "nadir." Every time the President's situation seemed impossibly bad, every time it seemed inevitable that his luck would turn, the opposite has happened: Some other disaster has come to public attention. Consider the list:

¶Watergate—Not only the original break-in of the Democratic National Committee and the cover-up, but also the campaign of sabotage against the Democrats, the burglarizing of the psychiatrist's office, the allegedly illicit use of campaign funds, the resuscitation of the International Telephone and Telegraph controversy, the dispute over the Presidential tape recordings.

¶The covert Cambodian bombing campaign and the officially sanctioned lying about it.

¶The conceded failure of the

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Phase 3 antiinflationary program and the uncertain prospects for Phase 4, which include the certainty of a severe, if temporary, shortage of beef.

¶Criticism of the expenditure of \$10-million in Government funds to provide "security" at Presidential residences and hideaways, together with suspicions about their acquisition so strong that the White House has now promised a third "definitive" statement on that subject.

¶And now the investigation touching Mr. Agnew.

No President, perhaps, since Harry S. Truman in 1946 has had to look down from the pinnacle of Presidential power on such a dreary scene. Beseated by rampant inflation, by industrial strife, by the onset of the cold war, by shortages of meat and automobiles and by charges of "government by crony," Mr. Truman was seen by the public as a hapless bungler.

Fire From Capitol Hill

Like Mr. Nixon, who has seen his prerogatives challenged by Congress on bombing in Cambodia, who has seen such nominees as G. McMurtrie Godley rejected on policy grounds, who has seen repeated challenges to his spending priorities, Mr. Truman was under fire from Capitol Hill. A young Democratic Senator from Arkansas, J. W. Fulbright, suggested that the nation was approaching paralysis and urged President Truman to resign.

Mr. Truman did not do so. He fought back and eventually, playing on the sympathy of the American voter for an underdog, managed to win reelection in 1948.

The parallel is inexact. None of the Truman scandals was so all-embracing as Watergate, and Mr. Truman had a common

touch that Mr. Nixon is considered to lack. But some thoughtful politicians here believe that the President may be able to manage a comeback, too.

One prominent Democrat said the other day that his constituents, whom he had been visiting, seemed to be turning against the Senate Watergate committee and coming around to the view that Mr. Nixon was being pilloried.

It may be, as social psychologists have long believed, that there is a threshold beyond which the body politic cannot go in thinking ill of its leadership and of itself. It may be that the "he's-the-only-President-we've-got" syndrome is beginning to develop.

Seen Staying in Office.

Neither impeachment nor resignation seems likely. So the President will remain in office for three more years, barring unexpected developments. One prevalent view in Washington holds that Mr. Nixon will function as a kind of caretaker President, neither rising nor falling much in public esteem. His ability to govern, in this view, has been crippled.

But that scenario appears to overlook the dynamic character of the modern Presidency, no matter who the incumbent is. So many forces and so many events come to bear on the White House — and will continue to do so over the next 40 months—that the President must act and react and in the process change the way he is seen. To put the point another way, Mr. Nixon, no matter how crippled he may seem at the moment, will inevitably have future triumphs as well as failures.

That gives him his chance, and he can be expected to seize it, beginning next week with his long-awaited response on Watergate, which will consist of three parts: a speech, probably on television; a "white

paper," and one or more major news conferences.

For Mr. Agnew, the investigation by the United States Attorney in Baltimore represents a far greater threat.

Even if the Baltimore investigation were to collapse tomorrow, it would be said for months that Mr. Agnew had been "implicated." After all, did not the Republican United States Attorney go so far as to send him a formal notification?

A Long Siege

The greater likelihood is that Mr. Agnew faces a relatively long siege of unfavorable publicity, even if he is ultimately exonerated. And in 1976, a year when his party will surely be looking for someone whose obvious uprightness will screen out thoughts of Watergate, the Vice President will be under a severe handicap.

Until the news of the Baltimore investigation broke, Mr. Agnew's supporters had been putting him forward as the perfect Mr. Clean—scrupulously honest, untainted by Watergate, a totally candid straight-shooter who had maintained his ties to the party apparatus while others in the White House were fiddling around with spies and burglars and wiretappers.

That will be harder to sell today and tomorrow and perhaps into 1976. Mr. Agnew's competitors on the Republican right, principally John B. Connally and Ronald Reagan, will not have to mention Mr. Agnew's troubles; they will need only to project their own distance from any Government scandal.

For the next three years, Mr. Nixon's image will be shaped in the way he manages the affairs of state, domestic and foreign. But Mr. Agnew, with no affairs of state to manage, will have to deal with the more insubstantial tissue of political imagery in the face of incipient scandal.