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How the President Is

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The evidence of President Nixon's mood as he prepares to make his defense in the Watergate case tonight is ambiguous.

To some, who have seen him and talked with him, he has appeared worried and distraught. To others he seemed in remarkably good spirits, considering the circumstances. Richard Nixon remains a very private man who rarely conveys his feelings even to close associates.

However, after five months of public disclosures of White House involvement

in Watergate and related matters, some clear patterns have emerged.

● The President has gone through several periods of anguish and frustration, expressed in occasional outbursts to members of his staff about charges that he considers irresponsible.

His associates insist he has come out of the worst of it and is now in a philosophical mood as he prepares his defense.

● He has not shown any of the kind of physical and mental deterioration displayed by previous presidents such as Woodrow Wilson and Warren G. Harding when under great stress. A Democratic senator who saw the President in mid-

July and again a few days ago said, "on both occasions he looked all right. He did seem rather nervous and tense, but he did not look fatigued. He looked rested."

● His tendencies toward seclusion, his restless search for retreats from Washington and his preference for making his own decisions without advice from independent minds have increased during the Watergate period.

● The belief that political enemies of the administration, Democrats and some Republicans, are using the Watergate charges to thwart the President's efforts to carry out the policies he was elected to achieve has increased among White House

aides, presumably with presidential encouragement.

Some long-time Nixon observers and associates, noting the President's refusal to compromise on submission of tape recordings of his conversations with former White House counsel John W. Dean III, and his public characterization of some of the Watergate charges as "murky, small, unimportant, vicious little things," read the President's mood as one of determination to fight for his position to the bitter end, a disposition he had displayed frequently in the past.

"I think he could pull out of it," said a long-time Nixon friend and campaign worker, who asked that his

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name not be used. "But I wonder if this is the way to do it."

During the five-month period, the President appears to have become more withdrawn as he has publicly sought to show that he was opening his administration to more diversity of thought after the departure of his top aides, John D. Ehrlichman and H. R. Haldeman.

Before the Watergate disclosures, he was said to have enjoyed long conversations with John B. Connally, whom he brought in as special adviser in May to help repair damage to his administration. But the Nixon-Connally meetings were reported to have been strained

and Connally left in mid-summer.

The bringing in of Melvin R. Laird as domestic adviser and Bryce Harlow as counselor in an effort to widen the administration's political base did not change Mr. Nixon's habit of consulting chiefly with his trusted subordinates — General Alexander M. Haig, Ronald L. Ziegler, who still carries the title of press secretary although he has given up daily meetings with the press, and Rosemary Woods, his long-time personal secretary.

Mr. Nixon still has long meetings with his close friend, Charles G. Rebozo, the Florida businessman — he was a recent guest at Camp David — but no one

pretends that Rebozo advises Richard Nixon on government policy.

The presidential trips away from the Washington White House have increased. During the five-month period the President has spent five long weekends at Key Biscayne, 25 days at San Clemente and most weekends at Camp David. He has recently made several trips to Camp David at mid-week and has gone on a number of evening excursions on the presidential yacht, the Sequoia.

In any event, the President now is reported more optimistic in private about his chances of overcoming Watergate and regaining control of the government.