

# 'What's Best for America?'

By James Reston

WASHINGTON, Nov. 1—In his confirmation hearings before the Senate Rules Committee, Gerald Ford, the Vice-Presidential nominee, recalled that President Eisenhower had a very simple rule for public men: "Get all the facts and all the good counsel you can, and then do what's best for America."

If President Nixon were to follow this advice in his present predicament, he would undoubtedly resign, but there is no evidence that he intends to do so or even that he is seeking the counsel of the conservative elders in the Republican party.

Instead, he is mounting a counter-offensive to prove that he is indispensable to the conduct of the nation's foreign policy, that his "détente" with the Soviet Union produced peace in Vietnam and a cease-fire in the Middle East, and that he is being persecuted by partisan liberals in the Congress, the Watergate prosecutor's office, the press and the networks.

It is hard to square this, however, with the comments coming in from conservative quarters at home and abroad. The Wall Street Journal remarked in a leading editorial the other day: "The President, in short, has become a pitiful helpless giant. For the most part, he has no one to blame but himself. The Watergate burglary did, after all, occur, as did the attempted cover-up."

"Even assuming that the President carried only indirect responsibility for these crimes, his handling of the matter has been consistently horrible. His defenses have always been too stiff, his concessions too late."

And after the White House announced that two of our tapes are missing, Norman C. Miller, the acting chief of The Journal's Washington bureau, concluded that "the President's misfortune is that his words are not widely believed any more. And everyone knows that he already has been compelled by events to retreat again and again. So one must wonder if he may finally be forced into total surrender of his office."

Even Senator Barry Goldwater, who stands to the right of The Journal, was quoted after the latest fiasco on the tapes as saying that Mr. Nixon's credibility "has reached an all-time low from which he may never be able to recover."

Appealing to the American people to wait for Judge Sirica's judgment on the tape controversy, and urging the President to go before the Watergate committee personally and defend himself, Senator Goldwater added: "As one schooled in electronics, I can understand [the loss of the tapes], but as a practical person in close touch with the American people, I doubt that they will accept this."

As to the notion that the nation's adversaries and allies overseas are cooperating with the United States because of their faith in Mr. Nixon, there is not much evidence that the Soviets lived up to the Nixon-Brezhnev "principles" when they connived at yet another war in the Middle East; or that the President's bold initiatives have improved this country's relations with Japan, Western Europe, India, Latin America or anywhere else with the exception of China. Even Golda Meir didn't come flying to Washington because she was happy with U.S. policies toward Israel.

Meanwhile, the reaction in Europe to the disarray of the Nixon Administration is one of dismay. The Economist of London, a consistent supporter of Mr. Nixon's foreign and economic policies, remarks in its current issue:

"Mr. Nixon is already a much shrunken President. For the first time since Roosevelt took over from Hoover forty years ago, the United States is led by a man who can claim no solid respect . . ."

"If Judge Sirica decides that there is nothing to mitigate Mr. Nixon's behavior, it would be better for Mr. Nixon to go than involve his country in an impeachment."

It is notable that The Economist, The Wall Street Journal, and the conservative National Review, while critical, are alarmed by the thought of a protracted crisis and want to see the issue brought to an early conclusion, but even periodicals like the conservative Spectator of London are savagely unyielding.

"The total dishevelment of the Administration and the utter dilapidation of the President and his office," The Spectator said, "puts the security of the Atlantic alliance at the gravest possible risk. . . . When we look westward now the sky is black. We recall the words of Oliver Cromwell, dissolving the rump of the Long Parliament in April 1653:

"For shame, get you gone; give place to honest men; to those who will more faithfully discharge their trust. . . . That was a time for a dictator to dismiss a corrupt assembly. Now is the time for an assembly to dismiss a corrupt dictator."

These are hard and even terrible words, but even when you listen to more sympathetic opinion from abroad, it certainly does not support the President's theme that he is being weakened merely by his liberal enemies and relied upon by his foreign friends.

This city is still deeply divided on the resignation-impeachment question; but on one thing it is united, namely, that the time for self-deception is past and that the time has come, in Ike's first rule, to "get all the facts and all the good counsel you can, and then do what's best for America."