

# Don't Quit

By William Safire

ESSAY

WASHINGTON, Nov. 4—Columnists James Reston and Joseph Alsop have joined Tom Wicker and Anthony Lewis in urging President Nixon to resign.

For the long-run good of the country, I believe the President should not resign. Here is a response to some of the most frequently given reasons for demanding that he quit:

1. *A President, embattled at home, invites miscalculation abroad.*

That was the point made, supposedly in the President's defense, by Henry Kissinger, and seized upon by thoughtful Nixon-dumpers as evidence of the danger of having a President who does not bestride public opinion like a colossus.

However, in the last month's Mid-east war, President Nixon proved that no flak, no matter how intense or prolonged, will stay him from acting firmly, coolly and decisively abroad. The most recurrent theme of his Presidency has been his firmness of purpose under fire, which has a way of resulting in honorable peace.

Much of the uproar abroad today comes from our allies, not our adversaries. The Neville Chamberlain elements of the British press, now decrying Mr. Nixon's "disheveled" and "dilapidated" leadership, are those who have shown themselves most ready to cast Hitler's escapees to the wolves, for fear of the discomfort Arab oilmen could inflict. Britain's hands-off policy might have evened the score for our 1956 Suez intervention, but this was hardly England's finest hour.

2. *The country just cannot take any more Watergate revelations.*

Some politicians are trying to transfer their own wrist-to-forehead public suffering to the people at large: because some Washington denizens cannot stand the gaff, they assume the country cannot.

A nation that experienced a decade featuring a rash of political assassinations, a series of race riots and city burnings that hung a pall of smoke over its capital, and more than 300 of its sons killed every week in an undeclared and unpopular war—such a nation is not about to come apart in this less violent decade at the revelation of political abuses. That is not blood, but vitriol, now running in the streets.

On the contrary, amid the worst of Watergate, the stock market has moved a hundred points up, interest rates and unemployment have come significantly down and the dollar has strengthened around the world. Perhaps a Washington too preoccupied to launch its weekly "bold new initia-

tives"—which used to lead to alienation, taxation, inflation and war—might turn out to be the best thing for the country. Whether or not a Federal numbness is the paradoxical cause, economic confidence is clearly on the rise.

3. *As long as Mr. Nixon remains President, the investigation of his Administration will be impeded.*

Of course it will. The President is the target of a grand jury and he can be expected to do what he can to defend himself. If he were to permit a Justice Department investigation to go in deep enough, and to go on long enough, to whip up unstoppable impeachment sentiment, would the President then win Brownie points for having run such a slambang inquiry?

Face it: Mr. Nixon stands accused, and he will cooperate as little as he must in the prosecution of himself, which under our system, is the right of the accused. To quit would be to confess guilt, as we have seen; no protestations of patriotic motive would wash; and it is wrong to demand that a man who considers himself innocent take action that is tantamount to confessing a crime.

If his accusers think the President has committed impeachable crimes, they should stop blaming him for not proving it for them. They should appoint their own prosecutor, arm him with the powers of judicial and legislative branches, and make their case or hold their peace.

4. *Resignation would avert a horrendous confrontation.*

Which is to say that the way to avert a constitutional clash is for one side to say it was wrong and to skulk off. By the same reasoning, why do not Congress and the courts "resign" the match—just forget about the whole thing? Same result—no clash—and the same feeling of resentment would ensue at justice not having been done.

A miscarriage of justice, whether the result of a witch hunt or a whitewash, is never "good for the country." In the sensible avoidance of confrontation, it is good to remember that it is not the President who is threatening to impeach the Congress.

It is possible to be furious with Mr. Nixon's encroachments on civil liberty, astounded at the blunders of his defense, worried about the erosion of public trust, fed up to here with apprehension that the worst is yet to come—and still, to resolutely oppose resignation.

Quitting would solve nothing, and could cause great mischief—about that, more in the next essay.