



Impeachment-- A Risky Business

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IS IT POSSIBLE to measure the risks of the impeachment process that has now begun? The answer is "yes and no." Only history can judge the deformation of the American political system. But the American political system is not the only stake on the table.

Suppose that the House finally votes a Bill of Impeachment. In that event, the question of the President's future will be before the U.S. Senate for about two months, according to the estimate of Senate majority leader Mike Mansfield.

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THIS MEANS, in turn, that the present semi-paralysis of the government will be transformed into near-total paralysis for a considerable period. Here, it is only necessary to think of the ugly response of the President's enemies, last October, when he took bold action to prevent direct Soviet intervention in the Yom Kippur war.

The false outcry, then, was that President Nixon was trying to "distract attention" from the Watergate mess. Only imagine the President's impeachment before the Senate, however. Imagine further that there is another enormous, dangerous challenge the U.S. has to meet somewhere around the globe. The President would be almost powerless to do what needed doing.

To see what this may mean, it is well to begin with the simplest rule of post World War II history. The rule, which cannot be too often repeated, is that whenever the U.S. looks weak, the Russians get tough.

Then think how weak we may look this

summer. We are not too comfortably situated now. But with the Senate arguing about the President's impeachment, we shall then add an unprecedented national crisis of authority and leadership.

There are signs, moreover, that the Russians are already, at a minimum, playing with the idea of the kind of tough action that is their automatic response to American weakness. Solid information has come in from both Warsaw and Bucharest that the Russians are at last beginning to organize a great spring meeting of Communist Party leaders.

The Soviet aim at the meeting — if it comes off — will be to send China into outer darkness, as a renegade from the Communist bloc. And all the analysts have always argued that a Soviet attack on China would necessarily be preceded by just this kind of action.

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FURTHERMORE this summer is probably the time when the Soviet general staff will have to tell the Politburo, "if you want to attack China, it's now or never"—because of China's nuclear progress.

If the President's impeachment goes to the Senate, there will be American impotence to act, especially concerning such a hideously difficult problem as a threatened Soviet preventive attack on the Chinese.

So there you have it. Anyone who says that attempting to impeach the President of the U.S. is not a risky business, may also look a great fool in the light of later experience.