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Mr. Nixon: Winning the Impeachment Battle

Though I am in a distinct minority among my columnist colleagues in this estimate, it is my belief that the possibility of President Nixon's impeachment (indictment) by the House is receding rather than advancing. If this is so then his conviction and ouster from office by the Senate is only a small gleam of lost hope in the eyes of his more bitter adversaries.

Of course, in dealing with anything in any way related to the Watergate scandals the prudent man will load his opinions down with so many ifs, ands, buts and on-the-other-hands as to bore the devil out of any sensible reader.

What follows, then, is deliberately imprudent, but not lightly or recklessly so. My conviction that the President's position is improving, rather than the other way round, rests upon both demonstrable realities and hunches so strong as to be irresistible.

As to the realities, the first and greatest is that Mr. Nixon is manifestly not only still in charge—and successfully in charge—of the foreign affairs of the United States but is also manifestly seen to be just that abroad. The public reception given recently in

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Paris to this, the most domestically harassed President of modern times, was in simple truth the warmest given an American chief in a long time.

It was, moreover, a demonstration of respect (a quality far more important than affection) in the very nation whose leaders Mr. Nixon had only a short time before told off as wreckers or would-be wreckers of Western unity.

Other European statesmen did not fail to grasp the meaning of this—which is that people long for strong leadership in world affairs whether or not they “like” the source of that leadership. Now, perceptions of this kind are not embargoed by the width of the

Atlantic ocean. To some extent, at least, therefore, it is reasonable to assume that what happened in Paris made some impact of the U.S. House of Representatives. Beyond doubt it did on the Senate.

To leave the area of realities for the areas of hunch and instinct is, to be sure, to step from something approaching the measurable to something approaching the mystic. Nevertheless, hunch and instinct have their place when one is trying to forecast the future.

My own hunch is that the biggest thing the President has going for him now — apart from the profoundly important first principle that the people trust his savvy in the life-and-death issues of national security—is simply

the enormous courage that he is exhibiting in his ordeal.

I do not suggest that the American public believes him to be immaculate about Watergate—or for that matter about his taxes. But I am totally convinced that more than any other characteristic the public admires guts in its public men. And guts Richard Nixon has got in plenty.

People think, too, that his adversaries are becoming too shrill, too cruel and too insatiable for revenge. They think that his enemies will not be content with an arm or a leg but wish in the most literal sense to destroy him and grind him into the dirt.

How do I know all this? I don't; I sense it, in conversations, in my mail, and to a lesser extent in the polls, which I have never fully trusted. Louis Harris gives the President a five per cent pickup within the space of a month. I predict that Mr. Nixon's willingness to pay an enormous tax bill that would never even have been levied against any other President will pick him up some more points within another month.

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