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Joseph Alsop WXPPost

The Case for Presidential Resignation

With considerable justice, the White House is attributing a fairly sordid motive to the Republican senators and representatives who have begun clamoring for President Nixon's resignation. Most of them desperately hanker to escape the inherently dangerous duty of voting for or against the President's impeachment and conviction.

But that is of little consequence. In truth, in this whole debate about the pros and cons of voluntary presidential retirement, there is only one negative argument that is worth a tinker's dam.

This is the argument most frequently put forward by the able and down-to-earth White House chief of staff, Gen. Alexander Haig. General Haig has emphatically warned all sorts of people — the congressional leaders in particular — of the current threat to the American political system. The system's stability will be gravely impaired, he has said, if Richard M. Nixon is prematurely driven from office, immediately after Lyndon B. Johnson was so bitterly attacked that he refused to run again, shortly following John F. Kennedy's murder in cold blood.

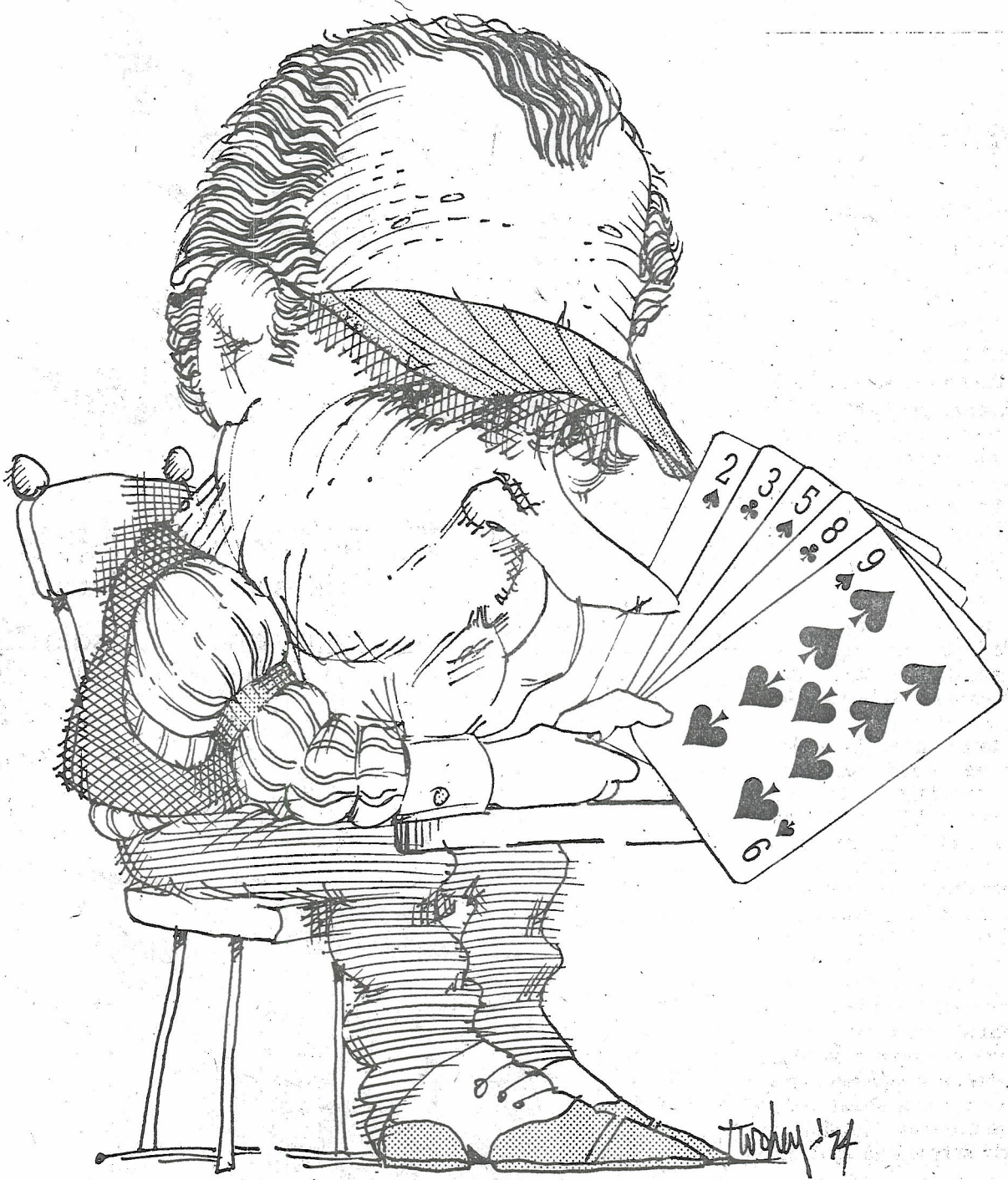
As a practical fact, however, General Haig's warning is really an argument against the President's impeachment and conviction, rather than against his voluntary resignation. For the American system's stability will be far less impaired by voluntary resignation, to forestall impeachment and conviction, than it will be impaired by a paralyzing "constitutional" process requiring at least six to eight months to produce the same result.

Meanwhile, it is also a practical fact that the arguments in favor of the President's resignation are daily growing stronger. The strongest argument of all, of course, is the dire public backlash from the release of the White House tapes.

In consequence, it is increasingly likely that a bill of impeachment will be voted by a substantial majority of the House. It is increasingly likely, too, that the President's "irreducible minimum" of Senate support will then be so reduced that he will be convicted. This likelihood can no longer be denied or ducked. It is now a fact that all must face, including the President himself.

There is also another, profoundly important fact that all must face, notably including the President. The Watergate-induced quasi-paralysis of the U.S. Government is already dangerous; and it will grow more and more dangerous, week by week, throughout the half year and more required for formal impeachment and conviction.

The effects of the quasi-paralysis are already omnipresent. An authoritative article in a recent *Wall Street Journal*, for instance, warns of the growing weakness of the nation's financial system, partly resulting from loss of confidence caused by Watergate. Again, because Watergate has already all but outlawed effective presidential leadership, we have no serious energy policy



By John Twohey—The Washington Post

—we have only the emptiest kind of fake-policy—when a firm energy policy is an urgent national need.

Yet the worst danger of all is in the broader field of foreign affairs. This is being half-concealed for the moment by the brilliance and rich promise of the Middle Eastern diplomacy of Secretary of State Henry A. Kissinger. But especially if the President is actually impeached by the House, no Kissingerian brilliance can make the foreign danger go away forever.

To be sure, it is snide and second-rate to suggest that a President facing impeachment will then sell out the U.S. in negotiations with foreign leaders. It is on a par, in fact, with the cheap stuff we heard when the Presi-

dent so bravely met the Soviet threat to intervene in the Yom Kippur war by ordering a worldwide U.S. military alert.

On all sides, second-raters then suggested that the President was only trying to distract attention from Watergate. But now the former Soviet ambassador to Egypt, Vladimir Vinogradoff, has given interviews to Arab newspapers flatly stating that at the time of the U.S. military alert, the Kremlin was fully ready to send seven airborne divisions to join the Sinai fighting.

The Watergate-induced paralysis of U.S. policy-making is the real source of the foreign danger, in fact. It is a plain historical fact that evidence of tempo-

rary U.S. weakness has always constituted an irresistible temptation to the Kremlin. Almost automatically, ever since the Second World War, the Kremlin has always yielded to this kind of temptation by taking rough and risky action.

Imagine, then, the temptation to the Kremlin of a paralyzed President heading a paralyzed U.S. government. Remember that the danger will be all the worse if Secretary Kissinger scores a great Middle Eastern success, thereby making the Kremlin eager to score heavily somewhere else. These are the reasons for thinking the President will eventually have to give more serious thought to resignation than he is said to be giving today.

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