

President Reportedly Confident On Departure for Middle East

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White House Sources Say That Nixon Believes His Legal Position and the Feeling of Public Have Steadied

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WASHINGTON, June 11 — President Nixon departed for his travels in the Middle East confident that his legal position on impeachment and public feeling about the Watergate scandal had stabilized.

Mr. Nixon was also confident that he would achieve diplomatic success in the Middle East and later this month in the Soviet Union and that these successes would strengthen his defense against impeachment, these aides said.

They reiterated, however, the White House insistence that the Watergate and impeachment considerations played no part in the President's decision to go abroad.

Several developments just before the President's departure were viewed by some commentators outside the White House as ominous portents for the President as the impeachment proceedings move forward in Congress.

One development was the disclosure that a Watergate grand jury had voted unanimously to name Mr. Nixon as an "unindicted co-conspirator" in the cover-up of the Watergate burglary. Another was the decision by his former special counsel, Charles W. Colson to plead guilty to an obstruction of justice charge and tell all he knew about the Watergate case.

Another Cloud

Another seemingly dark cloud for the President was a warning by a United States District Court judge that the President's refusal to turn over evidence for the "plumbers" case might lead to contempt of court proceedings. The Supreme Court decision to hear an appeal from the special Watergate prosecution for release of White House materials was another setback for the White House.

Finally, the President appeared to be moving toward a confrontation with Congress by refusing to obey a subpoena by the House Judiciary Committee. Several members of Congress warned that if the President adhered to this decision he would help assure an impeachment vote.

But despite these threatening new developments, "the President is in an excellent frame of mind," one of his closest aides said just before his departure for Austria.

Another White House aide, Raymond K. Price, a speech writer, told an interviewer that it was felt in the White House that "these recent disclosures are not damaging."

Public Anesthesia Seen

Mr. Price said that the public was becoming "anesthetized" to reports of wrongdoing by the President that were never proved. "We are seeing the beginning of a counterreaction by the public to the initial overreaction to accusations against the President," he asserted.

Ken W. Clawson, the White House Director of Communications, said that six months ago these latest disclosures would have been "bombshells" but "the impact isn't there any more."

"Last fall, we used to talk about what the next bombshell would be. But now there aren't any more bombshells and there

won't be any more in the future," Mr. Clawson added.

He said that the "low point" for the White House probably was the week of intense adverse reaction after the Presidential tapes transcripts were released.

"Now, the climate in the White House is one of growing confidence that the President's innocence will be accepted and he will not be impeached," Mr. Clawson declared.

The Presidential aides cite a number of reasons for what they say is the more buoyant mood of the President and his staff over the course of the impeachment process.

St. Clair Role Cited

One is the sense that James D. St. Clair, President Nixon's lawyer, has brought order and strength to the President's legal defense where before there was only chaos.

"For month after month we looked for apocalyptic solutions to get us out of this Watergate thing," said a White House staff member. "Now the legal office is taking this thing as it comes and doing a good job of it."

"If I ever need a lawyer badly, I'm going to get St. Clair," he added.

It is also felt that some of the pressure on the President has been eased by the fact that the outline of the charges against him have started to take shape.

"Until recently," said an aide close to the President, "we didn't know where we stood. But now that the charges have been narrowed there is less sense of mystery. At least we know what we have to face."

Recent statements from the members of the House Judiciary Committee and the special Watergate prosecutor's office suggesting that there was no evidence of crime in the milk and I.T.T. cases have reduced the feeling in the White House that the impeachment charges are a many-headed monster, the aide said.

Now, the White House asserts that only the Watergate cover-up has emerged as a possible impeachment charge. And the President, Mr. Price said, "is quite confident of his own innocence and therefore confident of his vindication."

It is this confidence, Mr. Price asserted, that has enabled the President to withstand the intense pressures of the Watergate scandal and impeachment process.

Finally, the President's decision to dig in and refused to provide the Judiciary Committee, the courts of the special prosecutors' office with any additional White House tapes and documents has given his staff the feeling that they have been given solid, defensible ground to stand on.

In sum, the White House is saying that while the impeachment crisis is by no means over and, in fact, a bill of impeachment is likely to be presented to the House of Representatives, the President now believes that the worst is over.

Whether the President's aides are right or whether they are convinced of these claims themselves are questions that will not be immediately answered.