

Reversal Of Early Position

Still Weighing Haig, terHorst Replacements

By Carroll Kilpatrick
Washington Post Staff Writer

President Ford, vigorously defending his pardon of former President Nixon as in the best interests of the nation, nevertheless said last night that Mr. Nixon's acceptance of a pardon could be construed as an admission of guilt.

The fact that members of the House Judiciary Committee unanimously agreed that Mr. Nixon was guilty of an impeachable offense "is very persuasive evidence," Mr. Ford said in a televised news conference.

The statements constituted a reversal of arguments Mr. Ford made as Vice President that he did not believe the former President was guilty of an impeachable offense.

At the second press conference of his administration, where 14 of the 21 questions dealt with the pardon or related issues, Mr. Ford also declared that his predecessor had been "shamed and disgraced" by his resignation.

Although the President accepted the tough questioning in good spirit, the intensity of he probing indicated the honeymoon with the press was broken if not shattered. But Mr. Ford maintained his composure throughout. He joked when asked who his next press secretary would be by calling for volunteers, and smiled when he found none.

He said he hoped to name soon a successor to J. F. terHorst, who resigned in protest against the Nixon pardon.

Mr. Ford also said he expected to name a successor to Alexander M. Haig Jr. as White House staff chief. Haig yesterday was named commander of American forces in Europe and commander of NATO.

The President emphatically denied that he made a deal

with the former President on the pardon issue.

When asked if there had been such an arrangement, he replied:

"There was no understanding, no deal, between me and the former President, nor between my staff and the staff of the former President—none whatsoever."

As he did yesterday with his decision on an offer of clemency for Vietnam war deserters and draft evaders, Mr. Ford insisted that he was thinking primarily of the nation's health and how to heal old wounds when he pardoned Mr. Nixon.

He conceded that the pardon "created more antagonism than I anticipated," but he said that his "top priority" was the health of the nation.

Looking down the road, he said, the view of a former President "in the dock" and charged with a criminal offense would have left unhealed wounds that have "festered too long."

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"I had no secret reason," for issuing the pardon, Mr. Ford declared in answer to the news conference's first question.

In a brief opening statement noting the beginning of the Jewish new year (Rosh Hashanah) and its emphasis on examining the deeds of the past year, Mr. Ford seemed to be explaining his position on the pardon. He said that "the record of the past year does not have to be endlessly relived, but can be transformed by commitment, new insights and new actions in the year to come."

Mr. Ford also said he had no inside information on the former President's health when

he made his decision. He would not disclose what information he has since received on the health question.

The main concern he had in issuing the pardon, Mr. Ford repeatedly emphasized, was to end the "turmoil and divisiveness in American society" caused by two years of Watergate so that public officials and others could concentrate on the domestic and foreign issues.

As long as the divisions continued, he said, responsible officials could not give their total attention to the nation's business. Therefore, he argued that in the long run his pardon decision was right.

The President insisted that he was still committed to building an open and candid

question, without any reservation."

Defending the decision to give the former President eventual control of his tapes and papers, Mr. Ford said they will be available "under subpoena for any criminal proceeding."

His staff is working with the special prosecutor's staff to alleviate any concerns it may have concerning access to the tapes, the President said.

He said that he agreed some time ago to give his congressional and vice presidential papers to the University of Michigan.

"I have no desire personally to retain whatever papers come out of my administration," he said.

In replying to a question about the possibility of a depression, the President said the country does not face that threat.

"We do have the problem of inflation," he said. "We do have related problems, and we're going to come up with some answers that I hope will solve those problems. We are not going to have a depression."

The announcement of Haig's appointment was made in Washington and Brussels prior to the President's news conference.

Haig is a former Army vice chief of staff who retired from military service last year after taking over as White House staff chief at the height of the Watergate controversy. He succeeded President Nixon's staff chief, H. R. (Bob) Halde- man, who resigned under fire.

The general's appointment as European commander has been expected for several weeks, and it was opposed by some American diplomats as well as by some NATO members.

Haig, 49, will succeed Gen. Andrew J. Goodpaster as NATO chief on Dec. 15 but will assume command of American troops Nov. 1. He is expected to leave his White House post at the end of this week for a vacation.

The President's choice of Haig was approved unanimously by NATO's defense planning committee in Brussels yesterday, shortly before the White House announcement.

The planning committee adopted a resolution expressing "lasting gratitude for Gen. Goodpaster's distinguished service," and Mr. Ford extended his appreciation to Goodpaster "for a job well done."

Haig, a four-star general before his retirement last year, will be restored to active duty by presidential order. His appointment does not require Senate confirmation.

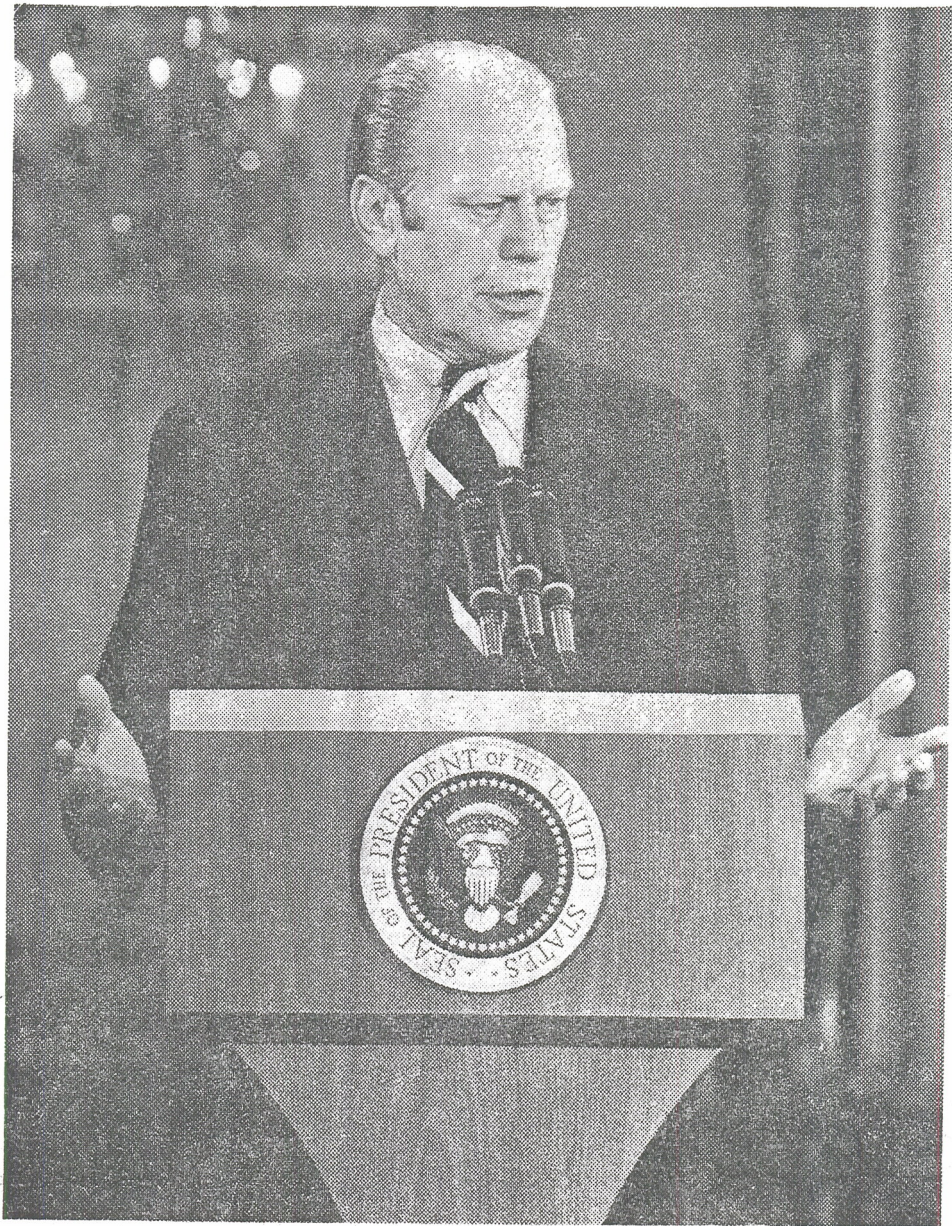
Shortly after Mr. Ford became President, he said through a spokesman he had asked Haig to remain in his post "for the duration," but shortly thereafter word leaked out that Haig was under consideration for the European assignment.

The White House said then that the general had expressed a desire to return to the army.

Although Haig repeatedly denied rumors of a conflict between the old Nixon staff, which he headed, and the Ford staff, reports persisted of friction between the two groups.

Haig was a leading figure in former president Nixon's defense during the Watergate controversy, and he was accused by critics of acting in a political role contrary to that of a professional soldier.

A native of Philadelphia, Haig is a graduate of the U.S. Military Academy.



By Frank Johnston—The Washington Post

President Ford: Nixon pardon "created more antagonism than I anticipated."