

Connections

The Last Straw

Foreign policy is Mr. Nixon's last card. A great majority of Americans are convinced, apparently, that the President is a felon. They believe his management of the economy has been disastrous. They do not like him. They do, however, have some confidence in his management of foreign affairs. The oil crisis and the wheat deal trouble us, but he has "kept us out of war." Grim associations, but leave those aside. It is more important that in our times peace, not patriotism, has become the last refuge of a scoundrel.

There are, of course, serious reasons for thinking that the public has misplaced its confidence. Zbigniew Brzezinski recently issued a new "report card" for Mr. Nixon like the one he originally devised in 1971, and placed Mr. Nixon on political probation. Brzezinski noted the disastrous decline of our relations with Western Europe and Japan, generously—if unjustifiably—balancing such problems with good marks for relations with China and the Middle East.

But Brzezinski's most damning observations came in relation to the Soviet Union and disarmament. He conceded that Mr. Nixon had done relatively well so far, but he noted that concessions made in SALT 1 menaced progress in SALT 2, and he was alarmed regarding the excessive "domestic stake in détente" which might lead Mr. Nixon to trade still other long-term prospects for immediate agreements.

In fact, as Brzezinski implies, we have an Administration which uses foreign policy to prop up its failing domestic position. This, as the classics knew, reverses the logical order of things. Domesticity, the inner order, is primary in moral as well as political terms. It is not only that one cannot sit on bayonets. The practical fact that one must have reasonable domestic support to conduct foreign policy, although relevant (for surely the Nixon Administration's domestic difficulties weaken its hand overseas), is less important than the moral imperative.

Rulership *exists* only because there is a domestic society, and is justified only when it serves the "good order" of that society in its internal life. Whatever political support Hitler's successes in foreign policy

won him from 1933 to 1939, the value of what he "did for" Germany—if value it was—cannot justify what he did to Germany internally. The kings who claimed that war was *ultima ratio regis* meant that it was the last reason in their relation with one another, not their own publics. Only in modern times could a ruler hope to claim, as Mr. Nixon in effect is doing, that disordering or corrupting the domestic order is justified by success abroad.

But after all, there isn't even that much success. As Brzezinski indicates, Mr. Nixon's desperate scramble for foreign kudos has led him to bargain away interests for headlines. And he is bargaining with a weaker and weaker hand.

This, it seems to me, poses moral problems for Mr. Kissinger. His reputation for genius is—deserved or not—an Administration asset. Can he afford to lend it to a regime which, in every significant way, endangers the general good? Bismarck, after all, preferred dismissal to letting William II call the tune. And if Mr. Kissinger does not know that Mr. Nixon is calling the tune, the Secretary deserves his reputation even less than his most severe critics imagine.

Kissinger has often been criticized for taking the great chancellors of the past as his models. There are worse heroes for emulation. The time has come for Mr. Kissinger to decide whether he will attempt to be a statesman cut to the measure of those who served *raison d'état* or an academic adolescent whose fantasy world is fulfilled by the trappings of political power.

What is involved is not this policy or that; it is the life of the state as such, our existence as a people and our obligations as a great power. William II "dropped the pilot." It is time for Mr. Kissinger to drop the captain. If Secretaries of State do not have a "last reason," they should at least have a last straw.

