

Victor Zorza

P. int 8/21/73

The Kremlin Tackles Watergate

The Kremlin has broken its long silence on Watergate to hint that it is willing to cooperate with the White House in a grand design to help Mr. Nixon out of his predicament.

Moscow Radio, in the first comment on the Watergate affair to be made available to the Soviet public since it all began, has explained why Mr. Nixon's enemies are out to overthrow his administration. Mr. Nixon's opponents fear, says Moscow's elaborate analysis, that he "could go too far in his steps toward the relaxation of international tension"—that is, in reaching a global agreement with the Soviet Union.

It depicts Mr. Nixon as being attacked by a new coalition of liberals with conservative Republicans and "extreme right-wing" politicians. They now oppose Mr. Nixon, Moscow says, because he put an end to the Vietnam war and is taking steps to relax world tensions. For this reason, he is under pressure from both "the military industrial complex" and "the extreme reactionary circles of big capital."

Moscow's silence on Watergate all this time could only have been ordained at the highest level—that is, by Party Secretary Leonid Brezhnev himself. No one else would be in a position to enforce a decision of this kind. It therefore follows that the silence could only have been broken on his orders—as a move, it would seem, in the internal leadership debate about Soviet-American relations, of which there have been some signs recently.

In the context of that debate, the public airing of the Moscow analysis—which has been whispered by Soviet diplomats for some time—means that those who view the matter in this way have now prevailed. The Kremlin, or a majority of the Politburo, now evidently believes that Mr. Nixon is in danger of being overthrown or so weakened as to put at risk the whole intricate network of long-term agreements on which Washington and Moscow have been working. The analysis implies that those members of the Soviet leadership who have been pressing their colleagues to make concessions to Mr. Nixon in order to enable him to claim major foreign policy successes have won the day in the Kremlin. Dr. Henry Kissinger has no doubt found some way to explain to the Kremlin that the joint Nixon-Brezhnev foreign policy could go forward only if Watergate is obliterated first with Moscow's help.

A series of successful foreign policy moves could again create an impression of purposeful and energetic activity in the White House. It might renew the promise of a glittering prize that would appear far bigger—in terms of a lasting global peace settlement—than anything which the Watergate "wallow" might yield. Dr. Kissinger is now working, with his usual skill, on a series of foreign policy initiatives as breath-taking, and as interlaced, as his earlier scheme.

Dr. Kissinger's first grand design was so complex and so ambitious that few people were prepared to believe it, even as it unfolded before their eyes. It is worth recalling now his trips to Paris to negotiate with the North Vietnamese, which continued in secret for nearly two years. We know now that they were intricately linked with the secret trips to Peking and with the visits to Moscow, and that these in turn, were linked with the negotiations for a Vietnam peace settlement that was virtually agreed in time for the presidential election, while most of the world remained convinced that no such agreement was possible.

His elaborate chess game with half a dozen players on the other side—with Moscow and Peking, with Hanoi and the Vietcong, with the vested interests that opposed a SALT agreement both in the Soviet Union and in the United States, was designed to yield not only a "generation of peace," but also to give Mr. Nixon the election. Now his grand design is for "several" generations of peace—and for a moratorium on Watergate.

His earlier design was worked out in great secrecy with the other players to culminate in Mr. Nixon's pre-election spectacles in Peking and Moscow. The new pattern is being traced in similarly secret but no doubt even more elaborate negotiations with the world's leaders. Mr. Nixon and Mr. Brezhnev—with Dr. Kissinger in attendance—did not devote a whole week's summit recently to whisper sweet nothings in each other's ears and to sign a dozen largely meaningless agreements. They met to work out the main lines of the strategy that would give them, the foreign policy prize on which they both rely for a place in history.

They know that foreign policy lends itself more easily to successful manip-

ulation by heads of government than such intractable domestic problems as inflation in the United States and economic weakness in the Soviet Union. The inherent structural deficiencies in both the capitalist and in the Soviet system which lie at the root of their economic troubles cannot be wished away either by a Nixon or by a Brezhnev. But they both believe that a global settlement could lead to major cuts in arms expenditures, to a radical re-structuring of world trade and of the flow of energy supplies and raw materials. They hope to use the more manageable foreign policy super-structure to work back upon some of the key elements at the base of the domestic economy.

This cannot be done simply by agreement between the Big Two. They are therefore now working together, almost in concert, to bring Europe into a more cooperative frame of mind—partly by resolving to make a start soon with the withdrawal of U.S. and Soviet troops, regardless of European wishes. Mr. Nixon's visit to Europe will not only put him back on the domestic television screen. It is designed to give an impetus to the restructuring of international trade and monetary arrangements which are responsible in no small part for the world-wide inflationary pressures.

For all the bickering between the European governments themselves, and between them and the United States, they want a strong White House to provide a lead for a more settled world system. They would prefer this to an impotent president wallowing in Watergate for the next three years, with America a crippled, pitiful giant and with the world economy lurching from crisis to crisis.

These are the assumptions on which the Nixon-Kissinger strategy to blot out Watergate by foreign policy initiatives is built. They are only the tips of the iceberg on which Dr. Kissinger has been working away in secrecy for many months past.

The new grand design is beginning to unfold—and the Kremlin may once again be able to help—on Europe, on SALT, and on other major issues. Who can stand up to the combined political power of the White House and the Kremlin? Perhaps only the irrepressible—or, as Moscow has it, the irresponsible—forces of the American political system.