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When and Where Will It End?

By C. L. Sulzberger

PARIS—Like the word "Vietnam" with which it has curiously managed to get entangled, "Watergate" has developed into a sort of code symbol for Americans' disgruntlement with themselves, their leaders and their destiny, disgruntlement on a scale transcending both in scope and in intensity even the sordid tragicomedy itself.

A smelly political, moral and legal scandal has become involved with major issues of national security and foreign policy, with the purposes of the United States, with bitter debates about the Constitution and the respective powers assigned to the three branches of Government.

By now the whole affair—political espionage and cover-up—seems tied willfully to things unrelated to Watergate like legislative efforts to control United States diplomacy, executive authority to take military actions, and the question of how far special agencies may go in efforts to safeguard national security.

Moreover, the evident popular disillusionment and confusion has damaged the nation abroad. Foreign investment in the United States has apparently been drawn down extensively in recent weeks, helping to raise the specter of

economic trouble, to enfeeble the dollar's position and to encourage the likelihood of a third and needless monetary crisis.

The international stature of the United States has been inescapably hurt. Although the outer world is both more puzzled and less concerned than Americans about Watergate and its weird ramifications, it sees a weakening in President Nixon's authority and therefore in his ability to act on issues which matter most to other countries.

The mess that has tarnished the White House fanned a Congressional revolt—just as Vietnam policy helped fan a conflict between the generations during the Johnson Administration. And that Congressional revolt has endangered Mr. Nixon's efforts to complete the Indochina settlement.

Historians looking back on the 1963-1973 decade, starting with the assassination of President Kennedy and featuring the murders of his brother and Dr. King and the shooting of Governor Wallace, may perhaps perceive a pattern connecting the chain of disturbances finally punctuated by the Watergate mess.

Is it too much to say that the succession of American tragedies came when an American dream began to vanish? As the United States dimly became aware that the American cen-

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

tury forecast after World War II was both a misjudgment and a misnomer, the emotional American people turned their disappointed dream into a nightmare.

The United States hadn't sought power. It was thrust upon a nation neither psychologically nor politically ready for it. Efforts by successive Presidents—Truman, Eisenhower, Kennedy and Johnson—to rally public support for such a concept were of limited duration. Indeed, Mr. Nixon's principal role seems to have been an attempt to tailor inherited ambitions to reality.

The thought that a Pax Americana would be supported for any appreciable period of time proved delusory. The country's diplomatic commitments were overextended by pactomania. The country's military establishment was overextended in terms of what people were ready to accept. The country's generosity was overextended in terms of foreign aid. One consequence was that the dollar, which had become a token even more important than gold, was immensely overvalued.

Orderly efforts to adjust this swollen position which, it now becomes

clear, the majority of Americans no longer endorse, have been deeply disturbed by movements that historians will associate with those two code words "Vietnam" and "Watergate." An unpopular war of a sort unfamiliar to Americans, who never tasted defeat and couldn't imagine it, was swiftly succeeded by an unpopular political scandal of a sort that was also unfamiliar and which tarnished the Presidential myth. This in turn managed to trigger off latent discontent.

Watergate has become famous even among peoples who have no idea what it implies. And there is grave risk we will have to pay heavily abroad for this. Certainly when Brezhnev goes to Washington next month, he will have in his pocket higher asking prices for bargains he hopes to conclude.

Chou En-lai has subtly needed his friends in the White House about evolving policy toward Japan. West Europe, while girding for another raid on the dollar, is showering skepticism on American intentions to jack up the Atlantic Alliance.

Indochina once again threatens to come apart as suspicion grows that the United States is after all, not only a paper tiger, but a tattered one at that. And the Middle East shows new signs of volatile fury. Where and when will it all end?