

## A Talk With Pierre

'Europe Is Schizophrenic  
Vis-a-Vis the United States'

By Philip Nobile

IF YOU have ever wondered whatever happened to Pierre Salinger, JFK's irrepressible press secretary, I have news for you. He lives in Paris and reports on foreign affairs for "L'Express" magazine.

Salinger has lost a lot of weight but none of his bounce. A quasi-household word in France, he appears frequently on French TV and acts as a sometime adviser to Valery Giscard d'Estaing.

But the pomp and circumstance are gone. Salinger does not even enjoy private quarters at "L'Express." His office, near the Champs Elysees, is small and bare.

Despite the radical change in status — from participant to observer — Salinger's interest in international affairs remains constant. He is especially well situated to comment

on the state of the United States as seen from abroad.

Finally, I must say I was surprised by his cryptic remarks on Chappaquiddick.

Q. French President Valery Giscard d'Estaing was quoted as saying he never met such an imbecile as Gerald Ford. How well is Ford's image in Europe?

A. I seriously doubt that Giscard ever said that. But in the eyes of Europeans, Ford appears to be a nice, weak president. There's no great regard for him here. By contrast, Nixon was considered a hero.

Q. How is that possible?

A. Europeans liked Nixon because of the force with which he exerted his foreign policy, even though this was sometimes at their

expense. Europe is schizophrenic vis-a-vis the United States. They're unhappy when a strong United States intrudes in their affairs and they are unhappy if the U.S. is too weak to assert its real role in the world.

Q. Has European confidence in America truly waned because of our defeat in Vietnam?

A. If you asked British or French leaders if they think any less of the United States or regard Vietnam as a failure of will, they'd tell you that the American commitment in Europe is just as good today as it ever was. But there is a public perception of disarray in American foreign policy.

Q. Therefore, Ford's and Kissinger's fear that statesmen might misunderstand the meaning of our Vietnam defeat is unfounded?

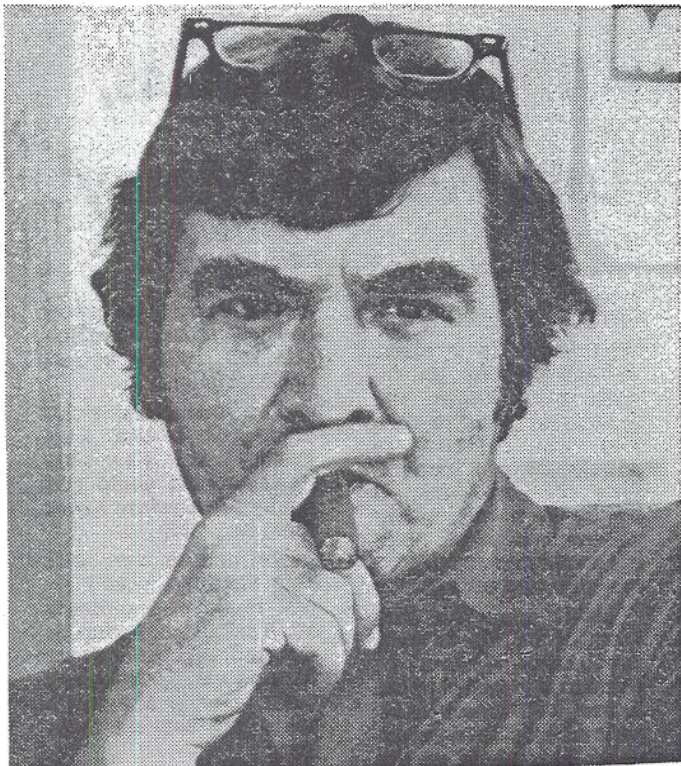
A. Not at all. For example, I am absolutely convinced that one of the reasons the Israelis refused to take a step toward peace was their uncertainty over the American commitment. Also, the Arabs probably felt that America's will to defend Israel will eventually erode.

As Syria's President Assad said to Kissinger recently: "Sadat is a fool to make peace with Israel. There are 140 million of us and only 5 million of them. You've just shown you'll abandon your allies in Vietnam and Cambodia. And if we wait long enough, you'll abandon Israel."

Q. Watergate appears to baffle Europeans. How come? Why doesn't crime in high places enrage Frenchmen?

A. Watergate couldn't have happened in France for several reasons. First, French reporters would never go as far as Woodward and Bernstein. There is no tradition of investigative journalism in France. Second, the national sentiment here runs against washing dirty linen in public. After a recent bugging scandal, the minister of interior quietly dropped those involved during a change in government. That's how the French handle such matters.

EMK (B)



PIERRE SALINGER



that criminality and politics are indispensable allies. That's why they're amazed at the American response to Watergate. Somehow or other this laissez-faire attitude doesn't create any greater political corruption than exists in the United States.

Q. Speaking of scandals, would a Chappaquiddick-type incident dash the presidential hopes of a French politician?

A. If it were explained as it's currently explained in the United States, yes. But you have to realize that Francois Mitterand, a man who came within 200,000 votes of being elected president of France, was once accused of plotting his own assassination.

Q. What's wrong with the current Chappaquiddick explanation?

A. I think there's a logical explanation for Chappaquiddick. At the time of the event certain people with

### **'The Kennedy myth made the Kennedy backlash inevitable'**

political motivations in mind made certain judgments that were totally erroneous for Senator Kennedy. If they had just explained Chappaquiddick as it really happened, it would have gone down better.

Q. From the perspective of 1975, the John Kennedy legacy doesn't look all that great. JFK left us with Lyndon Johnson, Dean Rusk and an incipient Vietnam war, a Green Beret mentality, a cold war, etc.

Q. Why are the French so cynical?

A. Because most Frenchmen have come to believe

A. I don't accept your description. The Kennedy myth made the Kennedy backlash inevitable. So it's fashionable today to say his presidency was a disaster. But the fact of the matter is, for example, John Kennedy was ending the Cold War and heading on the path toward detente with Russia. This was aborted by the Johnson administration. LBJ perverted Kennedy's limited objective in Vietnam.

Q. How do you know that?


A. I talked to Kennedy at length about Vietnam. I am absolutely convinced he was moving in the direction of trying to create a coalition government in Vietnam. He would never have put half a million men over there because he never believed for a moment that we could or should fight in Vietnam.

Q. You must confess that JFK failed miserably as a talent scout.

A. He was a helluva talent scout. Johnson always argued that all he did was carry out Kennedy's policies with Kennedy's advisers. But Johnson missed the point. When JFK was president there was always someone in the Oval Office blocking some of these ideas. Rusk himself said something very revealing to me. "I was never Secretary of State under Kennedy," he admitted. "I became Secretary of State when Johnson assumed the presidency."

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