

Watergate Appears to Have Damaged U.S. Abroad

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LONDON, May 1—The Watergate scandal appears to have damaged the reputation of the United States abroad, but at the same time many see it as a demonstration of the basic honesty of a system that can expose skulduggery in high places.

Public interest in Watergate has intensified virtually throughout the world, but there was no indication that it would significantly affect America's foreign policy. Trade, monetary and defense policies, of abiding interest to European governments, are dealt with at technical levels, officials in London observed privately.

Today, May Day, is a public holiday in most European countries and newspapers do not publish. However, Watergate has had a great deal of radio and television coverage.

The British Broadcasting Corporation, in a rare program change, kept its television going until after 2:30 A.M. to carry President Nixon's speech live from Washington and then had a panel of comment on it. The French television gave excerpts from the telecast today.

Japanese Are Doubtful

From Tokyo, it was reported that Japanese seem sorry to see Mr. Nixon in trouble. Watergate has most certainly diluted Japanese confidence in America, reports said.

Japanese displeasure with Mr. Nixon goes back to July, 1971, when he announced, without advising the Japanese Government ahead of time, that he planned to visit China. That became known as the "Nixon shock."

Watergate appears to have increased Japanese skepticism about the United States. Because the Japanese were ruled by the Americans during the postwar occupation, they have tended to look to the United States as a model for demo-

cratic government. Now they wonder about Washington.

On a lower level, one Japanese observed, "I guess politics are dirty everywhere." And that cynicism is reflected in many parts of Europe too.

For instance in Greece, where there have been no newspapers for three days during the Orthodox Easter holiday, the state-run radio has carried nothing critical of President Nixon. An Athenian, asked what he thought about Watergate, confessed ignorance. When told about the bugging attempt and sequence of events he observed: "So it happens elsewhere too."

Italy, in the midst of a wiretapping scandal of her own with political and international overtones, the press has drawn parallels that make Washington look cleaner than Rome.

Differing Views in Rome

Many Italian newspapers, including the Communist ones, point out that American newspapers, the judiciary branch and the Congress forced the Watergate affair into the open, whereas much of the Italian scandal remains cloaked in mystery.

The Italian scandal involves the widespread wiretapping. It is speculated the president of the republic had his telephone bugged. Some 30 telephone company employes and private investigators have been arrested. Nobody has been told who is behind all this, and there is scant chance that it will ever be known publicly.

Il Tempo of Rome, conservative and pro-American, said editorially today that Watergate was "a proof of democracy." On the other hand, Il Sole 24 Ore, a Milan daily, said: "All foreign offices in the world are not evaluating the risks of negotiating and concluding accords with an (United States) executive branch that has been so badly devalued." However, Italian officials do not see the likelihood of Watergate's affecting American foreign policy.

A report from Bonn indicates

no great public excitement about Watergate in West Germany, although the newspapers have been raising the question of what would happen should Mr. Nixon himself become involved. The most important thing to the Germans seems to be that Mr. Nixon is the man they presumably will have to deal with for the next three years.

From Belgrade a correspondent reported that there was no sense of shock over Watergate in Eastern Europe, where hidden microphones and phone taps are not uncommon. The Yugoslav press has been reporting the developments but without dramatizing events or using them for propaganda.

Last week at the Serbian Communist Party conference, a delegate said privately he was concerned that damage to Mr. Nixon's prestige and authority might erode the President's ability to push ahead with policies favored in Eastern Europe.

For the same reason, apparently, the Soviet press has avoided anything critical of Mr. Nixon. A brief Tass item on Patrick Gray's resignation was published in Moscow. The Soviet media treads lightly on personal affairs affecting other chiefs of state — with the exception of South Africa, Israel, Portugal and a few other countries.

The Russian leaders have staked a lot on personal relations with Mr. Nixon and do not want the President's Watergate embarrassment to rub off on them.

Fascination In Britain

The British have been fascinated by Watergate, and it has been reported extensively by the press and television. The public sees events as an unfolding drama that matches, and to some extent parallels, the Profumo affair here 10 years ago.

In that case, too, speculation was rife that the involvement of the War Minister, John Profumo, in a sex and security

scandal would embarrass the Government. Mr. Profumo resigned, but the Government remained in power.

After last night's television appearance of Mr. Nixon, some Britons felt compassion for him as they watched his nervous wince serve as a smile. However, many viewers were perplexed.

One Londoner, who sat up to watch Mr. Nixon, said: "I just can't see how a man can accept full responsibility and in the next breath absolve himself of blame. Is he trying to fool all the people all the time?"

New Blow Is Seen

British officials and diplomats in London felt that America's reputations in Europe had suffered again just as it was beginning to recover from a low point over the bombing of Hanoi last December.

The Times of London will say tomorrow: "The rest of the world needs to have a strong and effective President of the United States to deal with. Despite Watergate, the world accepts Mr. Nixon as such a President."

It said that "even if he has behaved worse than we believe and hope, it would be inhuman not to feel a spark of sympathy for the President."

The paper castigated the President's "second-rate subordinates," the "half men" with their "Pepsodent smiles and their football ethics," but observed there were plenty of such men in London too.

In Israel, anything that hurts Mr. Nixon is seen as a potential threat to Israel's interests.

Israeli officials are concerned about what Watergate could do to the President's influence in Congress, which must approve the arms credits and financial aid to Israel.

However, they expressed doubt that the scandal would affect any basic changes in American policy toward Israel and the other Middle Eastern countries.