

Watergate Influence on Talks With Russia Denied

Washington

Defense Secretary James R. Schlesinger said yesterday that President Nixon would not rush into a strategic arms agreement with the Soviet Union to improve his domestic political position.

If the Russians believe they can take advantage of Mr. Nixon's Watergate difficulties to obtain concessions on an arms agreement, he said, they will "soon be disabused of this notion."

"Anybody who knows Mr. Nixon knows full well he would do nothing to compromise national security in the long run, irrespective of any political disputes that exist within the United States," the defense secretary said.

Schlesinger sought to draw a firm line separating the strategic arms negotiations with the Soviet Union and the President's domestic political difficulties in response to questions raised by reporters at a Pentagon news conference.

While Schlesinger did not voluntarily raise the issue, he spoke at length and with unusual emphasis in seeking to deny suggestions in reporters' questions that the President's bargaining posi-

tion in the strategic arms negotiations had been critically weakened by the Watergate affair.

"The administration," he said, "continues to be in a position in which it can demand what is essential for the long-run security of the United States."

The Pentagon news conference, more by coincidence than design, was held shortly after a communique was issued in Moscow making clear that Secretary of State Henry Kissinger in his discussions with Soviet Party leader Leonid Brezhnev had failed to achieve the "conceptual breakthrough" he had been seeking for a permanent agreement limiting offensive strategic weapons.

New York Times