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Watergate Connection

By C. W. Maynes

In seeking plausible explanations for Watergate, intellectuals speculate on U.S. domestic traditions or the character of leading officials. But they overlook the connection between behavior in foreign policy and in the Watergate affair, a connection that suggests how difficult it is to prevent governments from using at home methods they use so willingly abroad.

Several years ago, two American Soviet scholars, Jan Triska and David Finley, were struck by the repeated tendency for imitation in U.S. and Soviet foreign policy. They sought an answer in the so-called Dupréel Theorem which holds that in conflict the character and actions of the "aggressor" and the "defender" soon tend to mirror one another.

Triska and Finley noted that after 1917 the Soviet regime introduced several new dimensions into foreign policy, virtually all of which were—perhaps in many cases had to be—copied by the U.S. The scope of the Soviet spying apparatus added something unique to the international system. The United States built up its own espionage network.

The Soviet regime developed the art of propaganda to unprecedented levels. The United States founded the U.S. Information Agency.

The Soviet Union funneled subsidies to various national Communist parties. The U.S. authorized the Central Intelligence Agency to subsidize political movements abroad.

But the foreign policy arsenal of our adversaries is not limited to the special assets already listed. Others include a controlled press, a citizenry encouraged to place obedience above all other virtues, government ability to monitor private activities, extreme centralization of political power, idolatry of those who hold it.

Dupréel's Theorem, it would appear, has for "defender" or "aggressor" validity in other areas.

A controlled press? Early in the war in Vietnam, the U.S. Government concluded that a more disciplined press would buttress the United States position. Several Administrations adopted the practice of planting false or misleading stories. They applied pressure against individual journalists.

A loyal citizenry? America always has had one. But policymakers repeatedly pointed to the lack of demonstrators in Hanoi and angrily denounced the lack of similar restraint

at home. Now John Dean reveals they went further. Adopting practices first developed by totalitarian states abroad, our leaders drew up lists of political "enemies" to be persecuted.

Government monitoring of private activities? No one has ever heard of disrespectful sentiments held by the staff of officials in Hanoi. How, then, could the President or his foreign policy adviser permit such sentiments at home? Better to insure loyalty by wiretapping members of the National Security Council staff.

Extreme centralization of power and idolatry of those who hold it? Foreign policy requirements have always been the primary justification for enhanced White House power. There are similar reasons for the idolatry. Ordinary men cannot be expected to negotiate with Mao Tse-tung or defeat the strategy of Ho Chi Minh.

But clearly there is danger that such attitudes will affect many areas of public life. Can we expect any government for long to follow one set of practices and attitudes in foreign policy and another in domestic policy? In confronting foreign and domestic foes, can a government resist trying methods on the latter that seemed effective in the former?

Many observers have expressed puzzlement over the unique character of Watergate. Leading intellectuals, who make their living finding plausible explanations, admit to failure in finding one for this "affair." After all, the whole operation is not in the American tradition. It may be in the American tradition to steal money but not to subvert the whole political process.

Yet subversion—ours and theirs—is part of the foreign policy tradition of the postwar era. It's the essence of the Cold War struggle. It can be no accident, in this regard, that several leading members of the Administration cut their political teeth during the height of national concern in the 1950's over the danger of political subversion.

Realization that undemocratic practices in foreign policy are not so easily shed when an Administration turns to domestic policy should be an important lesson of Watergate. It should serve as a warning that what we do abroad may some day haunt us at home.

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