

WATERGATE FOUND TO AFFECT SOVIET

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State Department Official
Says Moscow Appears
Uncertain on Tactics

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WASHINGTON, April 5--A high State Department official suggested today that Soviet leaders appeared uncertain of how far the Nixon Administration can maneuver on certain Soviet-American problems because of Washington's "great preoccupation with Watergate and its associated problems."

Appearing on the "Today" television program of the National Broadcasting Company, Helmut Sonnenfeldt, the counselor of the department, said that the Soviet Union generally supported the policy of improved relations with the United States but that on specific issues, such as trade, "They are concerned perhaps about how far we are able to go at the present time and so I think in that sense they are biding their time and checking their bidding a bit."

Mr. Sonnenfeldt, who participated in Secretary of State Kissinger's recent talks in Moscow, stressed the Administration's view that the trip to the Soviet Union "accomplished a great deal of what it set out to do."

Success of Talks

Ever since Mr. Kissinger returned to Washington eight days ago, the Administration has sought to counter the impression that the Moscow talks fell short of what Mr. Kissinger had hoped to achieve, particularly in limiting strategic arms.

This effort has been echoed in Moscow, where the controlled Soviet press has attacked various American publications for publishing negative appraisals of the talks.

Mr. Sonnenfeldt said that the talks "identified" not only those issues on which further agreements could be reached by the time President Nixon makes his planned trip to Moscow in June but also those issues "where there still remain substantial differences of view and opinion."

He said that in the talks on strategic arms, in which Mr. Kissinger and Soviet leaders did not achieve the "conceptual breakthrough" the Americans were seeking, "It now remains to be seen whether it is possible to narrow these differences sufficiently to achieve a meaningful and mutually acceptable agreement this year."

Trade Bill

"I would say that on the whole the trip accomplished a great deal of what it set out to do but it did come up against some substantial opinions and views in the positions of the two sides," Mr. Sonnenfeldt said. "To that extent it was disappointing."

Mr. Sonnenfeldt was asked about the speculation that Watergate was responsible for at least some of the inability to make concrete progress at the talks.

He said that "Watergate as such" had not been brought up.

Referring to the Administration's inability so far to get Congressional approval for promised trade concessions to Moscow, Mr. Sonnenfeldt said:

"The Soviets are conscious that for one thing there is some legislation in Congress they're interested in in the trade field which has run into considerable difficulty. I'm not entirely sure what they attribute that to, but in any case they noticed the fact that this legislation has not moved forward."

'The Issue Arose'

"So I do think they do have some questions in their own mind just how much we are able to move in this period of great preoccupation with Watergate and its associated problems," he said. "In that sense, the issue arose, yes."

Mr. Sonnenfeldt was the first participant in the Moscow talks to discuss them publicly.

Mr. Kissinger, now on his honeymoon in Mexico, was the source for the initial reports summing up the trip, but he spoke on a not-for-attribution basis aboard his aircraft. The Washington Post identified him this morning in a dispatch from Moscow as the "senior American official" who told newsmen that no breakthrough had been achieved on the arms talks. However, Mr. Kissinger, in his not-for-attribution comments, said that he felt some progress had been achieved, although he was unable to point to any concrete results.

President Nixon, in comments to Congressional leaders this week, said he was satisfied with the Moscow talks and intended to go ahead with his planned trip.

Some voices on Capitol Hill have been heard opposing the trip in view of impeachment proceedings, but others have supported it.