

The Watergate Affair

World Views on Nixon Reputation

BRUSSELS — (UPI) — A survey by UPI correspondents around the world has shown that the Watergate scandal could hurt President Nixon's reputation abroad and undermine his ability to carry out his foreign policy.

An important segment of officials and politicians, however, disagreed.

Governments of some of America's major friends and foes — especially the Soviet Union, West Germany and France — are trying hard to keep the scandal from upsetting their relations with Washington.

The Soviet-American detente appears little affected. But attempts to build a new relationship with Western Europe and Japan might be damaged if Nixon's reputation is badly tarnished by the affair. These conclusions are still tentative. The scandal's climax probably is yet to come.

The survey was based on a statement by Henry Kissinger, Nixon's chief foreign policy adviser, that "a great deal depends on how foreign countries assess the degree of authority" retained by Nixon after Watergate. Kissinger himself said he did not believe Watergate would affect foreign policy.

Many of the politicians and government officials interviewed thought that Watergate had hurt the President. If Nixon's aides are really implicated in the scandal, then "the prestige of the presidency is going to be seriously damaged abroad," according to a leading Conservative Party member of the British Parliament.

But one French foreign ministry official said: "It's nothing to do with us. I don't think it damages Nixon's authority any more than Nixon

would think our government scandals damage (French President Georges) Pompidou's authority."

Not one government spokesman was willing to make an on-the-record comment regarding Watergate, saying the situation was too delicate and admitting candidly that most other governments were not exactly without sin themselves.

Here are some of the views expressed country by country on Watergate:

- The Soviet Press, which once made the most of American crime and corruption, has ignored the scandal and Soviet officials refuse comment. As one Western diplomat said, "It's just one more indication that the Soviets are preparing the ground for Brezhnev's trip to Washington."

- In France, a diplomat said, "I don't think this will affect American relations with France, including Nixon's forthcoming meeting with Pompidou. It is completely outside our sphere. It is an internal American affair." But French newspapers — like the rest of the European press — began playing up Watergate this past week and the weekly news magazine L'Express devoted its cover and nine pages to the issue.

- In Japan, International Trade Minister Yasuhiro Nakasone passed off the scandal.

- In West Germany, a highly-placed government source said, "We can see no reason why Nixon's international image should suffer."

- In Britain, a member of Parliament from the ruling Conservative Party said he

thought the whole thing was a "trial by press," but added: "If key staff people are convicted, then I don't see how the prestige of the presidency and the President himself can but suffer."

- In Yugoslavia, the newspaper Borba predicted that "Nixon will survive . . . but not without serious scars from the wounds of Watergate."

- In the Netherlands, Hans Van Nierlo, parliamentary floor leader of the left-wing "D66" party said: "You can bet your life that the affair hurt the reputation of the President enormously in the Netherlands. Everybody here believes that Nixon knew about it."

- In Belgium, the financial newspaper Echo de la Bourse said that, if Nixon is to build a new relationship with Western Europe, "he must try to erase the nasty impression left by this scandal and wash his hands clean."

- In Sweden, the newspaper Dagens Nyheter said to build a new relationship with Western Europe, "He must try to erase the nasty Nixon's aides "have demonstrated that they do not claim to serve a respected and just regime." Per Ahlmark, 34, leader of the parliamentary youth wing of the Liberal Party, said the scandal "confirmed the distrust many of us have felt against Nixon as a character."

- In Austria, Herbert Kohlmaier, general secretary of the opposition Conservative People's Party, said, "There is no doubt that the affair is beginning to hurt American prestige worldwide. Greater damage can only be avoided by a fast and complete investigation. I don't know if President Nixon was involved, but I cannot imagine him knowing and approving of such actions."