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Major Role for Congress?

WASHINGTON — Can any good come out of the Watergate?

Possibly. It could be this: It puts into the hands of Congress a nearly perfect opportunity to recapture some of its eroded authority. It comes at just the right moment when it can be used to benefit Congress and not impair the presidency.

THE CONSTITUTIONAL authority of Congress includes "advice" as well as "consent." President Nixon's tendency has been to expect "consent" without inviting "advice."

It just won't work that way any more, and the reason is that Congress is strengthened by the Watergate scandal.

Nixon needs the co-operation of Congress as never before. To get it, he will have to extend to Congress a deference and a partnership which has broken apart in recent years. He will have to make Congress a participant in foreign policy formulation — or take the consequences.

Even with Nixon's first steps to cleanse the stain of Watergate from his administration, confidence in the President and in his leadership will not be easily restored. Nixon must appeal directly to Congress, deal directly with Congress and invite congressional advice if he is to get congressional assent.

The President has no acceptable alternative. He wants and needs new and enlarged powers to carry forward crucial trade negotiations. Congress will give them to him only if it is persuaded that the President will fairly heed Congress' views as well as his own.

He will be going to Europe this fall to try to work out a new Atlantic Charter. He can succeed only if the European leaders see that the President is speaking for the whole American government, not just for himself.

Nixon wants to keep a strong military presence in Western Europe, reach a compromise with the Soviets on offensive nuclear weapons, extend favorable trade terms to Communist countries, expand on East-West detente and build improved relations with the People's Republic of China.

The President will need congressional consent to achieve much of this and to get it he will have to welcome congressional advice. One cannot be had without the other.

It seems to me that the President has every incentive to go two-thirds of the way to do his part to recreate the climate, the machinery and the substance of that bipartisan approach to foreign policy which prevailed almost continuously under Presidents Franklin D. Roosevelt, Harry Truman and Dwight Eisenhower.

The lacerating controversies over Vietnam contributed more than anything else to the breakdown of this valuable mechanism.

IT URGENTLY NEEDS to be revived. Particularly because of the burden of Watergate, the President cannot function effectively without it. Congress can function more effectively with it, and through it Congress can begin to recover the large and influential role in foreign policy it used to exercise.

This is one boon which Watergate could bring into being.