



Watergate goes global: Amidst the Babel of voices, growing concern for the Presidency

Tim

How the World Looks at Watergate

It was a cloudy, complicated story, and if Americans had trouble understanding Watergate at first, the rest of the world hardly even tried. But with the orgy of lurid disclosures, the housecleaning at the White House and the prospect of even more bizarre twists to come, Washington's allies and adversaries suddenly awakened to the potential global implications of the scandal. Sensational headlines splashed across front pages of papers from Hong Kong to Hamburg and from London to Lagos. In one week, the three leading European newsmagazines all put Watergate on their covers. And their headlines sounded a sobering theme: *The Economist*—A QUESTION OF AUTHORITY; *L'Express*—THE SCANDAL THAT SHAKES AMERICA; and *Der Spiegel*—THE NIXON SCANDAL.

The reaction came in a Babel of discordant voices. But as might be expected, much of the speculation centered on the question of just how much Richard Nixon was personally involved in the Watergate affair and its cover-up. In many cases, the judgment was harsh. Right-wing British columnist Peregrine Worsthorne called the President's speech (seen live on BBC) "shameful and revolting" and said that he feared for America's future under Mr. Nixon's leadership. The Hong Kong Standard editorialized: "If some are prepared to accept the President's solemn pledge, they must still nurse serious doubts about his intelligence in the choice of his aides." And even some foreigners who rose to Mr. Nixon's defense hardly did

the President any service. Echoing a disturbingly widespread theme around the globe, one Thai Foreign Ministry official remarked: "Nixon only did what was right. He's the government, and it's the government's duty to see what the opposition does. The liberals in America call it bugging, but Nixon was only being vigilant."

Other observers were more charitable. The sober *Times of London* reminded its readers of Mr. Nixon's achievements in foreign affairs and added: "The rest of the world must be expected to see these great affairs as more important than Watergate." And for the record, most governments would only say that as far as they were concerned, Watergate was an American domestic matter.

Cheers: A number of foreign observers thought the affair demonstrated the strength of American democracy. They applauded a system in which independent courts and press and legislature had the power to expose a scandal touching the highest office in the land. "Watergate," said the *Jornal do Brasil*, "proves democracy has the resources to expurgate itself in public and with sound legal defense for the accused." The *Rand Daily Mail of Johannesburg* praised The Washington Post's investigative reporting as a sign of the value of a free press: "[The Post,] through its persistence and courage, has now exposed a major political scandal—perhaps the most serious in American history—which otherwise would have passed unnoticed."

Oddly enough, the gentlest reaction

came from capitals that would have had a propaganda field day with the scandal only a short time ago. While playing up Communist Party chief Leonid Brezhnev's trip to Washington next month—and taking an extraordinarily friendly line toward America (page 52)—the Soviet press all but ignored Watergate. *Pravda* passed up any mention of the resignations of H.R. Haldeman and John Ehrlichman and only briefly noted that L. Patrick Gray III had quit as the acting director of the FBI. Moscow simply had too many more important fish to fry with the U.S.—in the form of future grain deals and expanded trade—to risk propaganda fun with Watergate.

Reputations: Peking, too, found its options limited, and the Chinese were keeping up a rigid news blackout on the scandal. While they have fewer specific projects going with the Americans than the Russians do, Premier Chou En-lai and others have bet their political reputations on increasingly friendly ties with the U.S. As one China watcher in Hong Kong put it: "If Nixon's name is smeared in the eyes of the Chinese public, Chou En-lai's critics may begin asking some very tough questions."

For Moscow and Peking—and for much of the rest of the world—the key question was how much impact would the Watergate scandal have on the conduct of American foreign policy. Some optimists overseas took comfort from the fact that the Administration's foreign-affairs apparatus had so far been untainted by Watergate. But as some govern-

INTERNATIONAL

ments saw it, Richard Nixon had been so fundamentally shaken by the Watergate affair that it was unlikely he would be able to act with the same calculated unpredictability that had become his trademark.

Vietnam: The major test of Mr. Nixon's resolve might come in Indochina. Though Russia and China do not want a direct confrontation with the U.S., neither of them has exerted much pressure on Hanoi to go along with the Vietnam peace agreement. And some South Vietnamese—as well as many State Department officials in Washington—fear that the North Vietnamese might now decide to test Mr. Nixon's willingness to retaliate in Indochina by launching an all-out offensive. That may have been in the cards, Watergate or no, but the men in Hanoi could now reason that they have more room to experiment with a weakened President.

America's allies in the Western alliance had similar worries about the erosion of Presidential power. Western Europeans contended that a President at the mercy of an irate Congress and a disenchanted public would have a hard time negotiating such delicate matters as trade policies and monetary reform—and might give in to political pressures to reduce American troop strength on the Continent. At the same time, West German analysts were doubtful that the U.S. proposal for a "New Atlantic Charter" (*NEWSWEEK*, May 7) would get off the ground smoothly. "The credibility of the President has so suffered that his influence in Congress is sensibly weaker," noted Theo Sommer, editor of *Die Zeit*. "The question [asked] by serious observers is whether the Nixon Administration, shattered by the Watergate scandal, is at all able to deliver the goods on foreign policy."

Hubris: That depends largely on where the explosive scandal goes from here. If the dust begins to settle, most experts believe that the damage to U.S. foreign policy can be repaired. Some American diplomats even believe that the Watergate affair will have beneficial side effects. "This Administration was so overcome with its own hubris that it never learned that foreign policy needs to start with a sympathetic understanding of the other guy's problems," says one career officer in Washington. "Now, it's possible that our policy will be marked by more intelligence, fewer bold initiatives and a softer touch."

If the scandal reaches into the Oval Office itself, however, the international repercussions would be incalculable. "If it comes to the point where the President has to resign or is impeached," says one European diplomat, "the world would have to stop and take a deep, deep breath. SALT, trade, Indochina—you name it and Richard Nixon has been at the center of it." Things had not yet gone that far, but it was clear that Mr. Nixon's friends and foes alike around the world had already begun thinking the unthinkable.



Casualty of Lebanese fighting: Only Israel could win

A Case of Arab Against Arab

Sunbathers were lolling on the bleached sands of Riviera Beach in suburban Beirut when an army officer appeared and issued a puzzling order: clear out immediately. Pupils at the British Community School were in the midst of their lessons when teachers quickly began to herd them downstairs to the basement. The shops and sidewalk cafés of Hamra Street in the heart of the Lebanese capital were awash with citizens and tourists. Suddenly the first sharp cracks of gunfire split the air. "An Israeli raid!" was the population's first anguished surmise. But the fighting that erupted in Beirut last week—and spread like a brush fire throughout Lebanon—was a wholly fratricidal clash, a bloody pitched battle between the Lebanese Army and its brother Arabs, the Palestinian commandos in Lebanon. And yet it was a conflict that—by mishap or miscalculation—threatened to engulf the entire Middle East in a new crisis.

There was an unmistakable measure of irony in the Arab confrontation because, right from the start, Israel was the only potential winner. In fact, the fighting was spawned by the commandos' fury over the Lebanese Army's failure to stop Israel's recent assassination mission against terrorist leaders in Beirut (*NEWSWEEK*, Apr. 23). It was just the sort of fractious clash that could deprive the Palestinians of their only effective sanctuary in the Arab world. What's more, the bloodletting threatened to draw the Israelis into the skirmish, for once the Lebanese-Palestinian battle was joined, guerrillas from Syria plunged into Lebanese territory to aid the commandos. And while they withdrew relatively quickly from the fighting, they

remained in the mountainous Arkub region of Lebanon—a traditional staging ground for raids into Israel—and thus raised the specter of an Israeli counterstrike and a wider war.

The fighting began when the commandos, employing a favorite tactic, kidnapped two Lebanese Army officers and held them as hostages for three terrorists arrested for attempted sabotage at the Beirut airport. Instantly, Lebanese soldiers surrounded Palestinian refugee camps—which, in fact, are fedayeen redoubts—in an effort to force the guerrillas to free the men. Instead, commandos attacked an army check point and quickly followed up that strike with sorties against other military installations and outposts. Lebanon retaliated with anger and force. Tanks poured fire into the refugee villages and then, after other commandos encamped in the countryside went on the offensive, fighter-bombers struck at the Palestinian strongholds.

Snipers: Throughout the battle, Lebanese and guerrilla leaders groped for a way to stop the fighting. A leftist politician with close ties to the commandos arranged the release of the two kidnapped soldiers, and Lebanon's newly appointed Premier Amin Hafez met with fedayeen leader Yasir Arafat in Room 226 of Beirut's Makassed Hospital to work out a cease-fire. Although the two men came to an agreement, the conflict seemed to have a life of its own. Snipers crouched at the windows of high-rise apartment buildings in downtown Beirut, picking off incautious civilians as well as soldiers, and the usually frenetic and fun-loving capital—a playground for the Middle East jet set—became an anxious, shuttered city. Dynamite bombs were flung

Newsweek, May 14, 1973