

Overseas Criticism on Watergate Mild

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WASHINGTON, May 16—Although the Watergate scandals have raised doubts among some officials about President Nixon's ability to conduct a vigorous foreign policy, overseas criticism of the Administration has been light, and American foreign relations so far do not appear to have suffered significant damage.

A detailed survey by correspondents of The New York Times last week also indicated that despite heavy overseas news coverage of Watergate there has been no rise in anti-Americanism.

In fact, the contrary seems to be the case. Time after time, officials and newspapers have expressed admiration for the American system of checks and balances and for the doggedness of a free press in bring-

ing the affair to light.

In Paris, for example, before Watergate there was a tendency to dwell on such stereotypes as the arrogant world power or the conspicuous tourist. But the Watergate affair has gradually provoked understanding discussion of the American system.

In some countries with a long tradition of corruption in high places, there were expressions of surprise that Americans could get so excited about Watergate. Wiretapping, bug-

ging and "dirty tricks" are rather taken for granted by officials and politicians in Italy, and Italians are amazed less by the disclosures in the Watergate affair than by the violent reaction to the disclosures by the American press and public opinion.

These other points were made by the survey:

Two forms of allied concern have been voiced privately. European allies, for instance, have expressed apprehension that when Mr. Nixon meets with the Soviet Communist party leader, Leonid I. Brezhnev, next month, he may be so eager for agreements to offset the bad publicity of Watergate that he may "give away" too much. Saigon officials, worried that Mr. Nixon may be weakened politically, have voiced fear of a cut-off in

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American support if the Democratic-led Congress has its way.

The Soviet Union and China, which in the past would have seized on Watergate as "proof" of the decline of capitalism, have said nearly nothing about Watergate, in line with their improved relations with Washington. Some fairly bland articles have appeared in the East European press.

At Mr. Nixon's command, the American foreign policy machinery has been operating at capacity, despite — or as skeptics say, because of — Watergate. In addition to Mr. Brezhnev, Mr. Nixon will be meeting soon with President Pompidou of France and still plans to visit Europe and Latin America this year. Although Congress is rebuffing him on the bombing of Cambodia, his adviser on national security, Henry A. Kissinger, has gone to Paris for new talks with Le Duc Tho, Hanoi's chief negotiator, on cease-fire violations. The survey indicated no impairment of American Embassy operations because of Watergate.

Although Mr. Nixon is not a popular figure abroad, his foreign policy achievements have been widely admired, and this has led to expressions of concern in such places as Israel over what the future might bring if he were forced to leave office.

In many parts of the world, the Watergate affair has been a major source of safe conversation. Nowhere is this the case more than in South Vietnam. There, despite Government apprehension about the impact of the scandal on American aid, the press has been having a field day, noting that the United States is no less corrupt than Vietnam.

Vietnamese seem to love intrigue, mystery and complex and surreptitious organizations. They feel there is something almost Vietnamese about the way Watergate has unraveled itself.

A country-by-country breakdown of the survey follows:

Argentina

Largely because of the attention focused on the recent election victory of the Peronists and the friction among the Peronists, the military and urban guerrillas, Watergate has been virtually ignored in the press and in official circles. Even militants with a passionate interest in politics show no interest in it.

There is no sign that Watergate will affect relations between Argentina and the United States, and Secretary of State William P. Rogers, now on a Latin-American trip, will arrive as planned on May 24 for the inauguration of Héctor J. Cámpora as President. For much the same reason—absorption in domestic matters—Watergate has not received much attention in Chile either.

Britain

Watergate is viewed with extreme seriousness at the highest levels. Prime Minister Heath and his aides like Mr. Nixon and want to see him remain in office. They would like to see him emerge less tainted than he now appears to them.

Officials fear that as a result of Watergate, Mr. Nixon's relations with Congress will deteriorate and that the President will not get the trade bill that would allow him the leeway Europe wants him to have in the negotiations later this year.

Moreover, there is some private concern that Watergate has weakened Mr. Nixon's bargaining position with the Russians.

One British diplomat said: "It would be a real disaster for the world if Nixon had to resign. His strength has been in foreign affairs, building new relationships with the Soviet Union and China. Can you imagine where we would stand if Agnew had to pick up the pieces?"

But so far, British and American officials are agreed that

American foreign policy has not been damaged. The press covers the spectrum of opinion, and British interest seems to be growing, but it does not always seem to grasp the complexities.

The general feeling most often heard is one of embarrassment and sadness that the United States again seems to be tearing itself apart. There does not seem to be a great sense of alarm over what has happened or any surprise that American politics sometimes gets dirty.

Cambodia

There has been little reaction to Watergate in Cambodia even though the Cambodian bombing has become a major test of strength between Mr. Nixon and Congress. Some officials have expressed concern that Mr. Nixon "might be forced to soften his hand in Indochina," to reduce support of Cambodia, but this is not a new fear.

Some observers in Cambodia believe that the Congressional reaction — whether due to Watergate or not — may put very strong pressure on President Lon Nol to make a deal with the Communists.

Canada

There has been no official reaction to Watergate, but press coverage is nearly as extensive as in the United States, and dominates the news. It is overwhelmingly an expression of shock and dismay, a favorite reaction of Canadians to shortcomings of their big, powerful neighbor.

Since Mr. Nixon has never been popular with Canadians, they tend to find him rather than the Presidency, or the American system vulnerable. Canadians believe that a Watergate couldn't happen to them. "It's not because we're superior to American politicians," one politician said, "it's just that we can't see any circumstances in which it would be worthwhile to bug the headquarters of our opposition party."

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China

Although the Chinese press has not carried a word about Watergate, there have been summaries of foreign press reports in the special limited-circulation bulletin supplied to officials throughout China.

Recent visitors from Peking said that Chinese officials were interested but not markedly shocked by the Watergate revelations. They were said to take the view that it was an expectable development, given the basic weakness of the capitalist system. The failure to publish any articles reflects the general low-key approach to the United States, in line with the improved relations and opening of the liaison offices in Peking and Washington.

Chinese Communists in Hong Kong have resisted the temptation to tease or ridicule Americans. They seem to take the position that it is an internal affair of the United States.

France

Although France objects strongly to many of Mr. Nixon's foreign-policy proposals, particularly those dealing with the "new Atlantic charter," French officials seem to regret the Watergate affair and wish it would go away and leave Mr. Nixon to be argued with and criticized in terms of foreign policy.

So far, Watergate has had no impact on French-American day-to-day relations, with plans proceeding for Mr. Pompidou's meeting with Mr. Nixon. This does not mean that the subject will be ignored in their discussions, but rather that it will have a subtle influence on the climate.

Some officials believe Watergate will weaken Mr. Nixon in his dealings with both West European and with the Russians. But a view becoming more dominant is that Mr. Nixon's internal problems are going to strengthen him in foreign affairs because he will be able to use them to his advantage. One point is that he can argue to foreign leaders that Congress is going to be

much tougher on bargains than he is, and that if the French press him too hard for concessions, they must understand that he is in too much trouble with Congress to pull the concessions through the legislature.

The French seem reluctant to try to take advantage of Watergate because relations with the United States remain of primary importance.

Press reaction is heavy, but divided. Some publications refer to Watergate as a passing episode, while opposition papers, seeing similarities with the French Government, draw morality lessons from the secrecy and corruption.

West Germany

Chancellor Willy Brandt was in Washington when Mr. Nixon made his speech accepting responsibility for Watergate, and Mr. Brandt has told intimates that he was "shaken up by it."

The Germans believe—but Americans deny—that Mr. Brandt won concessions in the final communiqué because of Watergate and this had led to concern that Mr. Nixon might have to make even more serious concessions to the Russians.

Press reaction is heavy, and tends to the extreme. The German papers are saying, in essence: "Nixon must have known, and if he did, what will happen now, and he must somehow make a clean breast of it."

The American Embassy in Bonn said Watergate had not hampered its work, but one official said, "We have a feeling that there's nobody holding the reins back there."

Ordinary Germans do not seem to understand, care about, or otherwise take much interest in Watergate, partly because of its complexity and partly because it looks too much like European scandals.

India

President Nixon has never been popular in India and Watergate has not improved his image. But so far there has been no official comment, and relations do not seem to have been affected.

However, the Indian press has seized upon the scandal to compare the way political corruption is exposed in America and kept hidden in India.

Recently Prime Minister Indira Gandhi has criticized Indian newspapers for their anti-Government comments and she has even questioned the propriety of allowing such criticism.

As a result many Indians have emphasized that their country should draw lessons from Watergate. "The Government of the most powerful nation of the world was not powerful enough to emasculate its press," one Indian commentator wrote. "It is this independent press that is the biggest guarantee against both executive excesses and political immorality, the two main threats to democracy."

Israel

The Watergate affair has created a widespread shock in Israel. It has generated genuine concern among officials who have always believed that Israel's best friend in the United States has been the President, a feeling dating to 1948 when Harry S. Truman recognized Israel's independence despite State Department recommendations against it.

Because of this, and because of the close working relationship that has been established between Prime Minister Golda Meir and Mr. Nixon, officials here see Watergate as fraught with potential consequences for Israel.

"Anything that threatens Nixon's prestige and influence threatens us," an Israeli official said. There is also fear that Mr. Nixon might make a deal with Brezhnev at Israel's expense.

There is considerable praise for the American press and for the judicial system.

From ordinary Israelis, one hears a mixture of praise and amazement at the resiliency of the American system, at the system's ability to absorb such a shock, purging itself and continuing. If anything the Watergate affair seems to have deepened respect for the United States and its political system.

Italy

Watergate has created considerably less stir in Italy than in other European countries. In fact, Italian officials are privately criticizing the American press for "creating" a scandal, implicating the Presidency and

causing a Constitutional crisis with potentially far-reaching international consequences.

Behind this attitude is a cynical assumption that governments will misuse their power, and that a certain level of skulduggery is part of the game.

In a current scandal in Italy, many facts are still hidden, and liberal papers are comparing the house-cleaning in Washington with the reticence in Italy.

Japan

The Japanese press has given heavy coverage to Watergate, but so far the impact on the country has been limited. Although American prestige has diminished in Japanese eyes, the American press and American Congressmen have won considerable respect and admiration.

Undoubtedly, if the scandal continues, observers in Japan assert, some doubts may arise in Japanese Government and financial circles about the "reliability" of the United States. But so far there has been no direct effect on relations, and both the White House and the Foreign Ministry today announced that Prime Minister Kakeni Tanaka would begin talks in Washington July 31.

South Korea

As a country that depends on American support, South Korea fears that the Watergate turmoil may spill over into actions affecting its security, such as a withdrawal of American forces.

A responsible Korean official said: "This is strictly an internal affair of the United States. We are sympathetic with the Nixon Administration over such a misfortune and are hopeful that the case will be settled soon. The affair does not affect the traditional strong friendship between Korea and the United States at all."

The South Korean newspapers played up the Watergate story for a week. Then, at the request of the Seoul Government, they began giving it less attention.

Because of restrictions on freedom in South Korea, many people have increased their admiration for American democracy.

Laos

Prime Minister Souvanna Phouma recently told friends that Watergate came at "an extremely dangerous time" for all of Indochina. As he sees it, Watergate is likely to undercut American readiness to react to Communist pressure.

Specifically, he believes that military support for neighboring Cambodia, including air support, may be in imminent danger. He believes that without the current level of American support, Cambodia is likely to fall quickly, and that this will have disastrous effects on both Laos and South Vietnam.

Soviet Union

Because of its developing, closer relationship with the United States, the Soviet leadership decided to suppress news of the Watergate affair—although an article did appear today in a weekly publication.

The Russians are said to feel that publicity may lead to questions in the public mind of how Moscow could want to become so friendly with a corrupt Government.

There have been questions at public lectures, however, stemming from foreign broadcasts about the affair. In one case, a lecturer merely said that Mr. Nixon had to replace some officials tainted by an election scandal. End of explanation.

Privately, Soviet officials are concerned about the impact, particularly Mr. Nixon's ability to get Congressional approval of trade concessions promised last year. Mr. Brezhnev, however, has decided to come to Washington anyway.

Obviously, the trip to the United States is part of Mr. Brezhnev's diplomatic offensive. Postponement might have encouraged those in leadership who oppose rapid moves toward improved relations.

South Vietnam

There has been widespread popular interest in Watergate in Saigon, reflected in large newspaper headlines day after day, talk in coffee shops where politicians gather, and in Government offices.

Some South Vietnamese have seized upon Watergate to vent anti-American feelings, noting that Americans have long criticized them for corruption. But some Vietnamese, particularly

those educated in the United States, see Watergate as evidence of the basic strengths of the American political system. One young official said, for instance, "America can rightly claim to be the champion of freedom and democracy."

The greatest impact may fall on future aid to Saigon. Some South Vietnamese fear that the Communists may seize Watergate as an opportunity for a new offensive.

