

# Watergate and the Europeans

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PARIS, May 20—The Watergate affair has provoked many questions about how other world leaders plan to deal with President Nixon in a series of coming meetings.

President Pompidou of France is to meet Mr. Nixon at the end of this month. And the Soviet Communist party leader, Leonid I. Brezhnev, will be calling at the

**News Analysis** White House in June. Top officials in Europe are well

aware of Mr. Nixon's domestic troubles, and it is natural that Americans are concerned that the situation may affect foreign relations. But, in fact, every capital is the center of its own world. To each, foreign affairs really amount to how other countries are going to respond to its problems, its hopes, its fears.

A check of several European capitals has made clear that so far, at least, the Watergate affair has made little or no difference in government plans for dealing with the United States, and with President Nixon personally.

A French official laughed at a report that Chancellor Willy Brandt of West Germany had mentioned "domestic difficulties" with sympathy to President Nixon, and said that President Pompidou would never be so awkward as even to refer to the scandal in conversation with the American leader.

## Specific Interests Pursued

Protocol is the least of the matter, however. The key point is that other countries have specific interests to pursue with the United States. The most important ones are medium- and long-term interests fairly likely to outlast any administrator, and leaders are also well aware that they are dealing with the United States, not just its current President.

Personalities do matter, of course, and unless they are bitter enemies, heads of government tend to form a kind of club with fraternal feelings of compassion when a member is undergoing a bit of nasty business in his own backyard.

But governments do not judge their national interest on such bases, and it is essentially their view of national interests that engage government leaders when they meet.

Thus, in France, preparation for the Nixon-Pompidou meeting is concentrated almost en-

## Leaders' Plans for Dealing With U.S. Little Affected

tirely on coming trade and money negotiations, which will not reach a real bargaining stage until next year and a time of decision perhaps for several years.

Paris is getting tough again about the United States, but it has nothing to do with Washington's domestic political distress. It does have to do with President Nixon, because the French Government suspects that his policy in the economic negotiations is aimed at shorting up United States exports and the dollar at Western Europe's expense.

## French Policy Shifting

There appears to be another subtle evolution of French policy at present, more strongly Gaullist than two or three years ago in terms of refusing concessions to the United States, less so in terms of strengthening the European Community.

The proposal of a "new Atlantic charter" by Henry A. Kissinger, President Nixon's adviser on national security, has provoked irritation, when not downright derision, from France. The official view here is that the United States has been put down somewhat from its brief tenure as lion-king of the world of nations as a result of basic economic, technological and political developments.

In that view, this is all to the good and Europe should take care not to be maneuvered into a position of bolstering the United States back up on top.

That is not the view in London, which still places much more value on Atlantic partnership, nor in Bonn, which feels a need for good support from the United States as well as from Western Europe to counterbalance the tug of its new relationship with the Soviet Union.

Italy has no outstanding problems with the United States, so Rome does not bother itself about the effectiveness of the Nixon Administration as a result of the Watergate affair. But Rome also appears to be undergoing a policy evolution toward greater detachment from the United States and more involvement with the European idea, a considerably diluted version of the French trend.

The Common Market's plans for "regional" policies, in which Italy's partners might be expected to contribute substantially to Italy's impoverished south, is a key factor in this.

In all the chancelleries of Western Europe, in any case, there is a certain sophistication about the fall of governments. They operate on the parliamentary system, election dates are flexible and they assume that the bureaucracy will carry on and the system will provide government whether or not leaders have the power and will to lead.

The Netherlands finally got a new government a few weeks ago after nine months without one. Asked how the country had gotten along, a high Dutch official said comfortably, "Oh, this country is so well managed it doesn't need to be governed."

The European feeling is that the United States, which has seen a very drastic shift of internal power from the legislature to the Presidency in two generations, might quite as easily see a reverse shift without losing its ability to operate in the international arena.

## How Will Congress React?

The one question that does bother other leaders about President Nixon's position is how it will affect his ability to get the legislation they want from Congress.

Representatives from Cambodia and South Vietnam do worry whether the President's loss of authority in Congress will diminish his ability to deliver the United States aid and support they want. Reports from Moscow indicate that Mr. Brezhnev is concerned about extension of most-favored-nation tariff treatment to the Soviet Union, which has been expected from Congress by this fall at the latest.

Not only Soviet but other East European Communists have, apparently quite earnestly, expressed suspicion that the whole Watergate affair was really a right-wing plot to sabotage Mr. Nixon's policy of new agreements with the Soviet Union.

That is an extreme example of the truism that in foreign affairs leaders tend to look at others through their own prism. But to a degree, the principle holds generally that it is not the man on the other side of the summit table or what his compatriots think of him that matters to foreign negotiators; it is what he can and will deliver when it comes time to deal.