

Foreign Dangers Ahead

WATERGATE HAS TURNED the Apocalyptic loose with a vengeance. "Can the nation survive?" "Will politics ever be the same again?" and similar questions are unsettling the intelligentsia.

And it can only be a matter of time before some New Left paranoid "proves" that CREEP inspired the shooting of George Wallace. The noise is going to be terrific, particularly since the media, on humanly understandable grounds, are evening a few scores with Mr. Nixon and his merry men.

I WANT TO REPORT that the Republic will survive. Already there are "Free the Watergate 5,000" bumperstickers, and Kingman Brewster, President of Yale, has allegedly asked whether it is possible for a Republican to get a fair trial in the United States.

In short, the sardonic realism which is the bedrock of our society will withstand almost anything. Since Americans don't really trust government in the first place — a quality which disturbs some, though I find it reassuring — Watergate merely confirms their prejudice.

The fundamental problem lies elsewhere, notably in how other nations perceive the impact of Watergate. The London Economist has devoted several articles to this subject, raising the question of how vulnerable Watergate has made President Nixon to Soviet pressure, to say nothing of his capability to deal with Congress on crucial foreign policy matters.

What is at issue here is the extent to

which Mr. Nixon can retrieve what the Romans would have called his "gravitas," his right to be taken seriously as President.

This is a very ominous matter. If Leonid Brezhnev leaves the United States next month convinced that Mr. Nixon is a political eunuch, the repercussions could be worldwide. For example, the fragile truce in Vietnam — which the Soviets played a leading role in formulating — could be written off as an unnecessary "concession" to the United States.

Or Brezhnev, who did not make it to the top of the pile on the basis of his compassionate nature, could up the ante, convinced that Mr. Nixon desperately needs some sort of diplomatic "triumph" to offset his domestic difficulties.

A number of people have learned the hard way the risks involved in underestimating Richard Nixon's intelligence and resourcefulness. It is possible that he may manage the retrieval, although he must move far more rapidly than he has to date.

ODDLY ENOUGH — given my partisan delight as the Uriah Heeps parade before the grand jury — I wish him well. The international fortunes of the United States and the authority of the President must not be undermined by domestic scandal.

However, in the event that he does not manage to re-establish his "gravitas," the President has in my judgment but one honorable course open to him: to resign. The presidency must be occupied by a President — we can not tolerate three years in international limbo.