

Gloomy Days on the

Washington

WHEN ONE THING goes wrong for an administration, it often happens that things falter or fall apart in other fields as well, and this seems to be what is happening in Washington now.

It is not only the Watergate, but the dollar crisis, the energy crisis, the constitutional crisis over bombing Cambodia, and various other things that are now troubling a distracted and partly paralyzed Nixon Administration.

There is something eerie about the way Mr. Nixon's fortunes have plunged from spectacular success a few months ago to spectacular difficulties now, and it recalls the Spenglerian mood of a passage out of Henry Kissinger's Harvard thesis of almost a quarter of a century ago:

"Life is suffering," he wrote, "birth involves death. Transitoriness is the fate of existence. No civilization has yet been permanent, no longing completely fulfilled. This is necessity, the fatedness of history, the dilemma of mortality."

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THINGS DIDN'T go very well for President Nixon with President Pompidou of France in Ice-

land — maybe about as well as expected, but that isn't saying much. The French are suspicious that Mr. Nixon wants to deal primarily with a united Europe and this revives echoes of their Gaullist nationalism.

Also, there seems to be no way to reassure Paris that the United States is not trying to make a deal with the Soviets for the reduction of American troops in Europe or that the American multinational companies are not trying to dominate the Common Market.

Besides, the thought of Mr. Nixon making what he calls "the grand tour" of Europe strikes them as a little regal and out of touch with Mr. Nixon's present low standing in the west of Europe.

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THE NEXT BIG foreign policy event for Mr. Nixon will be the visit of Leonid Brezhnev, the Communist party chairman from Moscow, and the outlook for that one is a little dim too. The Russians are reminding their American friends that Mr. Nixon was able to get on the television from the Kremlin last year and tick off a number of

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specific agreements he had reached with Brezhnev and Kosygin.

It is now being suggested, and not very subtly either, that it would be pleasant if Brezhnev were able to do the same before he completes his American visit at the end of the month. The Russians would like this to include some kind of specific progress in the arms limitation talks, the strategic arms talks, and the trade talks — specifically the granting to the USSR of "most-favored-nation" status in trade.

But here again the skeptical and even hostile attitude of some powerful members of Congress over the Watergate disclosures is leading some conservatives to fear that Mr. Nixon might make an unequalled arms deal with Brezhnev just to divert attention from Watergate. This is a highly unlikely development, but in the present mood of Washington, Mr. Nixon cannot be quite sure that he can get the support of the legislators for the sort of agreements he'd like to make with the Soviets.

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MEANWHILE, the new Australian government is needling the President both about Watergate and the Cambodian bombing, and threatening a visit to Washington by the new Australian prime minister, with or without an invitation.

Relations with Canada have been strained over economic and oil pipeline differences, and they are not likely to improve soon when both governments are weak and the Nixon Administration is being charged in the Watergate hearings with bugging the Canadian Embassy in Washington.

The China connection is holding for Mr. Nixon fairly well. New diplomatic emissaries are now established in both Washington and Peking, but further political or economic arrangements are likely to be very limited and slow.

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ADDING TO the gloom is the controversy over Kissinger's agreement to allow the FBI to bug his own colleagues on the National Security Council, which has cast some doubt on his own future.

If Kissinger can be seen as the brooding student of Oswald Spengler, Arnold Toynbee and Immanuel Kant, on whom he wrote his Harvard thesis, it was this highly sensitive Kissinger who reacted almost sorrowfully to the charges of his part in the bugging incident.

No doubt this present mood of pessimism will pass as the Administration gets deeper into the year's foreign policy agenda, but for now, it is fairly grim.

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