

National Security Changes Meaning?

THERE IS A CURIOUS ambivalence about Watergate, the widest scandal ever inflicted on the American free society.

It has made honest and loyal Americans ashamed that men appointed to power and high place can be so devoid of the elements of probity and good faith. It has made many cynical, when these same men wallow in self-righteousness to save their little skins.

But at the same time the heroic effort to expose this cancer, to get at its malignant roots, is a sign of the toughness of the American fiber to withstand assault on its integrity.



The reference is to many of the parade of witnesses before the Ervin Senate Committee who, a few months ago were drunk with the arrogant power they wielded, and now are in disgrace, or facing it.

You must have noticed that a large share of the Watergate malefaction was justified by the term "national security," and in a bare half-year this term has changed its meaning for thoughtful Americans.

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THERE EXISTS SUCH a value as national security, and all nations, all peoples, seek it, sometimes wisely, sometimes in folly. What did national security achieve for the Third Reich?

In any case, national security is not attainable when public officers lie by rote, cheat the people they are presumed to serve, and in treacherous panic each other, engage in felonious acts and shabby, blundering conspiracies. No American is secure in the hands of such knaves.

The American people have seldom, if ever, harbored so contemptible a crew as these frightened little men with their sleazy, national security cop-out.

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SO, FOR THE LONG HAUL, the people may have learned something about national security they didn't know, may have discovered a new definition for it. National security is made by honest, forthright, historically perceptive men, determined that the nation and its people shall be defended with common sense in a dangerous, predatory world.

Last week some of the malefactors in the Ellsberg break-in reached a new low—they contended it was not a burglary, since nothing was taken from the office of Ellsberg's psychiatrist. Thus if a prowler is caught by police ransacking your home, will you accept his plea that he didn't take anything?

Crimes like Watergate were not exposed in the old absolute monarchies, nor in modern dictatorships. The people had no voice in the structure or function of their governments to bring wrongdoers to heel.

So again, for the long haul, our people may have won, instead of losing all they had to scoundrels. And again, they can thank the Founding Fathers. In their debate in the Constitutional Convention they, who had no dream of electronic bugging, clearly foresaw assaults on self-government, and they proposed to thwart them.

In 184 years it has worked, not perfectly but well, and it is working today for the observance of the dejected.

September 27, 1973