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Threats On Three Fronts

At the moment, Fidel Castro and his Cubans have thoughtfully prepared positions for the troops and artillery that would be needed to attack the historic American base in Cuba, Guantanamo Bay.

At the moment, again, it appears downright likely that the North Vietnamese will fairly soon tear up whatever remains of the truce agreement so painfully negotiated by Secretary of State Henry A. Kissinger and Le Duc Tho. Hanoi's minimum objective, as indicated by massive military preparations in flat violation of the truce agreement, would appear to be tearing away from South Vietnam the northernmost quarter of the South's total territory, Military Region I.

At the moment, finally, there is still an all too serious chance of renewed war in the Middle East, with the Soviets actively aiding in the destruction of Israel. As those words are written, in fact, the intelligence community is riven by an argument about why the Soviets have greatly diminished their airlift of supplies for the Arabs in the last couple of days. This could mean that the Kremlin has wished to cool off President Anwar Sadat and the Egyptian high command, so that they would negotiate more seriously with Secretary Kissinger. But it could also mean that the Kremlin wants to be ready for prompt intervention in a renewed Mideastern war, with the big Soviet air transports revved up on the southern Russian airfields where the Soviet airborne forces are now on alert.

In sum, you may be careless of the most solemn U.S. commitments in Southeast Asia; but you still have to begin your calculations with Israel's future, and to end at Guantanamo Bay. These ugly signs are in fact cited in inverse order of importance. For the Cubans are highly unlikely to use their prepared attack-positions, unless this country has other, large troubles somewhere else.

You may also be in a righteous fever for President Nixon's impeachment. But you still have to include in your calculations the Watergate horror's hideous effect on the U.S. world position. All the foregoing threats are unquestionably Watergate-connected.

In truth, these ugly threats would either not exist, or they would not be such serious threats, if those making the threats had not begun to scent how badly Watergate has weakened the President, who has so often in the past proved his toughness and courage in threatening situations overseas. If you are in the currently fashionable fever of righteousness, you will, of course, say that if the President has been weakened, it is all his own fault. It is an arguable view.

But it is even more arguable that righteousness is less urgently important than the vital U.S. interests that are now threatened. So even the Congress and the famous media might well reflect a bit on what disasters may ensue for the American future, when you have public gloating in both Moscow and Hanoi because the President of

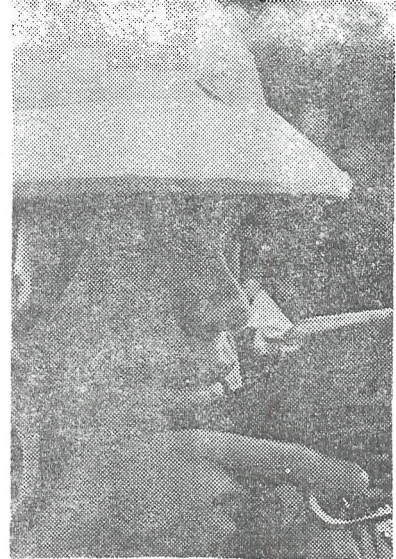


The Mideast

the United States has been politically crippled.

As a guide to the calculations above-suggested, it is best to take the most important case—which is of course the Middle East. Before these words can be printed, Secretary Kissinger may have pulled a negotiating rabbit out of the hat in Cairo. Pray God he manages to do so. But you have only to examine the alternative to see what desperate trouble this country is now in, partly because Watergate is now viciously inter-acting with our neglect of our power.

If there is renewed war, and the Soviets intervene, Israel is likely to be humbled and at least half-crushed. Yet if this horrible result is avoided, no more than a couple of years will be gained for the United States to gather



Vietnam

its wits again and to restore its lost standing of a serious giant power, by rearmament and in other ways.

The reasons for this bleak outlook are bleakly simple. The best imaginable settlement that Secretary Kissinger can negotiate will eventually involve Israeli withdrawal from most of a demilitarized Sinai, plus the subsequent re-opening of the Suez Canal. This best settlement will therefore permit the Soviets to pose as the Arabs' revenge-givers and to pour their ever-growing naval power into the Red Sea, the Indian Ocean and the Persian Gulf. For this, the Kremlin needs the canal re-opened.

Consider, then, the kind of states that own the crucial oil resources of the Arabian peninsula. The Soviets,



Guantanamo Bay

as revenge-givers, will have their impact, even in Saudi Arabia. They will have infinitely greater impact, however, if the rulers of Arab oil almost all wake up one morning to find themselves looking down the throats of scores of missile-launchers on Soviet guided missile cruisers, with one of the new Soviet aircraft carriers in the immediate offing as well.

In other words, this game's stake is control of the oil-tap, which is now the jugular of the western world. If there is a settlement, the United States may have time to avert Soviet control of the oil-tap by really drastic measures. If there is no settlement, and Israel is humbled, Soviet control of the oil-tap will be prompt and automatic. These are not pleasant thoughts.