

# Messages To the President

By James Reston

WASHINGTON, Nov. 8—This city is always looking for clues to the future—particularly now clues to the future of the President—and in the last few days it has seen two events of considerable importance.

First, the Congress of the United States, by a two-thirds vote overriding his veto, has insisted on limiting the President's power to make war without its consent. This, the White House said, "seriously undermines this nation's ability to act decisively . . . in times of international crisis."

Second, the European allies and Japan have refused to follow the President's lead in the Middle East, and while approving Secretary of State Kissinger's compromise to save the cease-fire, have insisted on defining and publishing a pro-Arab peace settlement even before the Israeli-Arab peace talks have begun.

Speeches against the President and polls showing a steep decline in public confidence do him no good, but these are serious actions—almost personal rebukes—which limit his authority and challenge his leadership, both at home and abroad.

Eight times before on substantial issues of policy, the Congress failed to override the President's veto. Earlier, the Senate did refuse to confirm his nomination of Clement F. Haynsworth Jr. and B. Harrold Carswell to the

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Supreme Court. Also, the Congress had refused to approve his policy of building a supersonic transport plane, and it had forced him to stop bombing Cambodia last Aug. 15.

But the vote against his authority to make war in accordance with his interpretation of his powers as Commander in Chief was a direct challenge to the President's interpretation of his constitutional rights, and the challenge came, not only from the Democrats but from members of his own party and his normal supporters in the conservative Democratic South.

Eighty-six Republicans in the House of Representatives and 25 in the Senate voted against him. Though Senator Barry Goldwater of Arizona called the vote "the most dangerous thing that has happened to this country since before the Constitution was written . . . totally illegal, totally wrong," the Congress insisted.

Nobody can be sure what prompted this vote. The arguments for compelling the President to come back to the Congress for approval of military intervention abroad make sense after the reckless personal adventures of Presidents Johnson and Nixon in Vietnam, but they are ambiguous at best, and maybe even unconstitutional.

Still, the Congress is troubled, resentful over Watergate and all the President's maneuverings and deceptions, and it wanted to send him a message. It doesn't have the heart to impeach him or force his resignation, but it wants to warn and rebuke him, and so it did.

Japan and the allies in Western Europe, with less reason, are also giving the President a hard time. They don't want to take any responsibility for trying to settle the Arab-Israeli struggle in the Middle East. They don't even want to cooperate with the United States in trying to get arms to Israel to hold the balance of power against Moscow's arms to the Arab nations. They just want oil to keep their factories going, and it doesn't come from Israel.

Accordingly, the European Common Market countries, under threat of an Arab oil boycott, are calling on the Israelis to make concessions to restore peace. They want Israel's withdrawal from the territory in the Sinai peninsula and in Jordan and Syria that Israel occupied in the 1967 war.

Japan, facing a loss of 40 per cent of its oil imports, is now calling publicly for Israel to withdraw to the territory it held before the 1967 Arab-Israeli war. Without normal supplies of oil from the Arab countries, Japan says it will have to reorganize its industry from "the roots up." So, as the Tokyo newspaper *Mainichi* observed, Japan is shifting from "a position of neutrality to one of a pro-Arab posture."

A year or so ago, even a few months ago, it would have been inconceivable that the Japanese or the European allies would have opposed President Nixon or American policy so directly and so publicly in the middle of such delicate negotiations by the Secretary of State.

Or that the U.S. Congress, in the middle of a crisis, would have overridden the President's veto, limiting his freedom to make or threaten war. But spectacular events over Watergate and the other scandals of the last few months have weakened his authority both in Congress and in the allied capitals, and this is now his problem.

It is no longer a question of his critics in the press or his political adversaries in Congress. His own Republican and Southern Democratic allies voted against him and overrode his veto, and his own allies in Japan and Western Europe didn't support his efforts for peace in the Middle East. In many ways, they were unfair to him, but this is the way it is. He has lost their trust, and they are following their own interests and doing as they please.