

The President 'Still Respected Abroad'

After visiting and reporting on a dozen different countries in the last month or so, I returned with the impression that despite Watergate President Nixon still commands substantial respect abroad.

The fact seems to be that most foreigners have little interest in, or understanding of, American domestic affairs, but they are keenly aware of our foreign policy, for the simple reason that nearly everything the United States does internationally affects the rest of the world. Mr. Nixon may not be liked or even admired abroad, but he is still seen as the man who ended or at least suspended the cold war and thus relieved the fear of a world-ending nuclear confrontation.

The great mass of people everywhere craves peace above all else. Their lives can be made uncomfortable by such crises as the energy shortage, but nothing is irreparable except nuclear extinction, and much of the world believes that awful prospect has been lessened by the Nixon-Kissinger de-

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tente with Russia and China, the two great Communist powers.

As long as foreigners feel that they have a vital stake in the continuation and growth of the still fragile detente, they naturally want to see it nursed along by the man who initiated it—Richard Nixon—regardless of his domestic delinquencies, which are seen as deplorable but irrelevant internationally.

Mr. Nixon also seems to be benefiting from a somewhat similar attitude on the part of a number of Americans. This may help account for the fact that, while an overwhelming majority in the United States believe the Presi-

dent is guilty of personal misconduct, many are still not eager for his impeachment. If Mr. Nixon had failed on the foreign as well as domestic front, he wouldn't have a prayer of surviving.

Like most foreigners, Americans see detente as the path to peace. The latest Harris poll, for instance, shows majorities ranging from 72 per cent to 19 per cent favoring further accord between the superpowers on matters extending from control over nuclear submarines and antimissile weapons systems to mutual withdrawal of forces from Europe.

Despite record low levels of confidence expressed in Mr. Nixon as President, Harris reports that 70 per cent still give him high marks on "working for peace," 64 per cent on "handling relations with Russia" and 60 per cent plus on "handling relations with China."

Harris also has a warning for Democratic presidential aspirants who "might well be making a fatal tactical blunder in assuming that the strains resulting from the Soviet policy toward emigres and the Mideast war can be taken to mean that the country wants to return to a hard line in relations with Soviet Russia and other Communist countries."

It sounds as if Harris had in mind Sen. Henry Jackson (D-Wash.) who has been riding a presidential boom based on his criticism of the Nixon-Kissinger detente with Russia. Jackson seems to think that Mr. Nixon, of all people, is soft on communism and, in trusting Russia, is living in a fool's paradise. That's the way Mr. Nixon used to talk about Franklin D. Roosevelt and his Yalta agreement with Stalin.

The President, nevertheless, is betting that detente is the best thing he's got going for himself. His apologists, notably Vice President Gerald Ford and Sen. Barry Goldwater (R-Ariz.), have been encouraged to dwell on the administration's peace efforts. It is interesting to note, incidentally, that Goldwater, who had been sharply critical of the President, came back from a recent trip abroad in a more respectful attitude toward his leader.

Considering all the disclosures yet to come, it is questionable whether anything can save the President, but if anything can it will be further successes abroad. The triumph of Dr. Kissinger in moving the Arabs and Israelis toward peace has been a big plus, and the Secretary of State has not hesitated to give Russia credit for its behind-the-scenes "constructive" help.

There is, of course, some risk for the President in gambling everything on Soviet cooperation. He is, to some extent, putting himself in the hands of the Russians, for if they pull the rug from under detente, Mr. Nixon would be fatally embarrassed. It no doubt would be the end for him. But if his political opponents try to wreck detente merely to wound the President, they might in the process also wound the United States.