

Atlantic Alliance on Shaky Ground

By Jack Anderson

LONDON—The Year of Europe, which Secretary of State Henry A. Kissinger had promised for 1973, lies in shambles. It is more likely to go down in history as the year the United States lost its European allies.

For the Atlantic alliance appears to be breaking apart. Its cornerstone, the historic British-American partnership, is crumbling.

European leaders are absolutely appalled at the scandals—that have been swirling around President Nixon. He has been so weakened by Watergate that he has lost his influence with his Atlantic partners.

Privately, they hope he won't come to Europe in April to celebrate the 25th anniversary of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. They are not at all eager to be pictured wining and dining the scandal-scarred Nixon. One prominent British diplomat quietly encouraged me to publish a hint that the President stay home.

Kissinger still has credibility with European leaders who, indeed, regard him as a diplomatic miracle worker. But they feel he has neglected Europe. In private conversations, British

Prime Minister Edward Heath has gone so far as to say that Kissinger, who was born in Europe, doesn't understand its politics.

Europe's formal diplomatic set also dislikes Kissinger's freewheeling style. They complain that he doesn't consult them, that he treats them more like subordinates than partners.

British leaders, who for the sake of diplomatic niceties asked not to be named, told us that the special London-Washington relationship is breaking down. They attribute this to the inability of Kissinger and Heath to get on the same wavelength. Kissinger also has trouble penetrating the frosty reserve of British Foreign Secretary Sir Alec Douglas-Home.

At the ambassadorial level, communication has been limited largely to routine messages. Kissinger always made his diplomatic overtures over the head of the recently departed British Ambassador Lord Cromer. A Foreign Office source described the Kissinger-Cromer relationship as "decidedly chilly."

But far more damaging to the British-American partnership has been the behavior of American Ambassador Walter An-

nenberg, who has made himself the laughing stock of London by curtesying instead of bowing to the Queen and by using painfully pretentious phrases in her presence. "He is a fool," summarized one British diplomat, "a disagreeable fool."

One casualty of the widening British-American rift may be the nuclear-sharing agreement. The suspicion is growing in London that Kissinger may be willing to end the nuclear collaboration as a bargaining point to solidify the Soviet-American detente.

This has led to quiet soundings about a possible British-French nuclear-sharing program. Not without concern, Western Europe is awakening to the possibility that it may have to form its own independent nuclear force. British sources also confirmed published reports that Kissinger angrily canceled a plan to fly SR-71 spy planes out of a base in England during the Middle East fighting. The stories claimed that Kissinger was angered by Heath's demand that British knowledge of the operation be kept strictly secret.

According to our British sources, Heath merely insisted that the Israelis should not be

shown the reconnaissance photos taken by the spy planes. In any event, Kissinger ordered the spy planes to bypass Britain, which resulted in costly mid-air refueling operations and delayed for three days some of the intelligence on Soviet deliveries to Egypt and Syria.

An underlying cause of the Kissinger-Heath split has been the prime minister's emphasis on European unity at the expense of Atlantic unity. Having brought Britain into the Common Market, he has laid less stress upon the American partnership and more upon the European partnership.

The oil crisis increased the strain on the Atlantic alliance, of course, as the British and French scrambled to make their own separate deals with the Arab oil producers.

Kissinger has scarcely concealed his annoyance with the Atlantic allies, particularly the British. Increasingly, they are now showing their annoyance with him.

Footnote: The Foreign Office denied that relations with the United States have deteriorated. Similar denials have been issued by the State Department.

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