



# The Kremlin and The Watergate

— Joseph Alsop

THE GOVERNMENT'S analysts are currently conducting exhaustive post-mortems on the signs and symptoms observed during the recent Moscow visit of Secretary of State Henry Kissinger. For the first time, Watergate's impact on the Kremlin bulks large.

President Nixon's troubles were treated as non-existent by the Russians until only a little while ago, when they began to be mentioned in the Soviet press.

When Kissinger was in Moscow, however, a further step was taken that has much meaning. In the course of the opening talks, there were a good many heavy-handed Soviet hints that the President's hands were tied because he was having such severe political difficulties at home.

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THE HINTS reached the point, reportedly, of forcing Kissinger to reply to them directly — that as Secretary of State he could testify domestic politics had had no effect whatever on the President's foreign policymaking. This seems to have produced a beneficial effect.

At any rate, the hints ceased. The press pointedly reproduced a passage from a dinner-time toast by the Secretary of State, naming President Nixon and General Secretary Leonid Brezhnev as the personal architects of improved Soviet-American relations.

These specific Soviet responses to Watergate, with their somewhat mixed pattern, must also be interpreted against the background of what mainly happened in the Moscow talks concerning matters of

substance. The two main developments were a show of extreme Soviet testiness about the Middle East, plus a virtual deadlock on the second round of SALT.

Significantly, there would have been a total deadlock on SALT if the Soviet-American discussions had continued as they started. Because of the threatened deadlock, Brezhnev himself declared, the Soviet defense minister, Marshal Andrei Grechko, was hastily called back to Moscow from Baghdad.

Marshal Grechko's approval was evidently secured for a little bit of give in the Soviet position. So the second round of SALT was not broken off.

Adding the whole thing up, the official analysts shrewdly see a Soviet "reconnaissance," aimed to discover how much President Nixon's position had been weakened by his troubles at home.

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MEANWHILE, however, what happened in Moscow should also be a pretty stern warning to responsible Americans. Anyone ought to be able to see the magnitude of the future risks, if the Russians are already hankering to exploit Watergate-induced weakness.

The main thing is that the Kremlin will later be tempted to really brutal adventures by the total paralysis of the U.S. government that must result from a presidential trial by the Senate lasting for many months. If the full facts prove that the President is guilty of crimes, such as obstructing justice, impeachment is unavoidable. Yet no one should forget that the risks will be appalling.