

Impeachment, as Viewed Abroad

"It was very evident," said Alexander M. Haig Jr., the White House chief of staff, "that European leaders and world leaders with whom the President met continue to look to the United States and President Nixon as an essential factor in the realization of the continuing efforts to develop a structure for stable international environment."

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By Jean-Francois Revel

PARIS—I hear Americans say that the impeachment of President Nixon would have disastrous consequences for the image of the United States in the world. But inside the United States, they add, the crisis would not be very serious, particularly as a result of the appointment of Gerald R. Ford as the new Vice President.

Impeachment would even be the only way of normalizing domestic political life again and of avoiding one-party elections this fall and in 1976.

But alas, my interlocutors say to me, what would the rest of the world think of a trial of the President? It must be avoided.

This line of reasoning, often pressed upon me during a recent stay in New York, appears contradictory. It is not as if the world would think ill of the American political system and American society if the President of the United States were forced out of office. On the contrary, it would if he were not.

For months, Asians and Europeans, South Americans and Africans have been reading in their newspapers the results of polls taken in the United States on Mr. Nixon and his credibility. They find that, according to these polls, a growing majority of Americans believe the President guilty of having at least covered up, if not having inspired, the representatives of people who carried out Watergate activities. They also believe that he is guilty of financial fraud and of violating the law on the financing of election campaigns, among other things.

How could world opinion have a

good image of the United States if the country continued to maintain as head of state a man that more than half of the citizens believed to be dishonest?

In spite of the anti-American sentiment prevailing in the world, most people, even the French, feel admiration, overt or secret, for a political system that permits the investigation of illegal acts attributed to the President and his associates.

The French notably know down deep, though they don't admit it frequently, that 20 Watergates could take place at home—and apparently have taken place—without those responsible being taken to task or without even public opinion being informed.

French parliamentary committees are practically powerless, judicial power is subordinate to the executive, much as is television.

Among democracies then, and not even speaking of the other political systems, with Watergate American democracy has supplied proof that it is perhaps the one in which the mechanisms of control over the abuse of power function with the greatest and most irresistible efficiency.

For this same reason, abstention from impeachment would degrade the image of the United States abroad, and not impeachment itself.

Very simply and very naively, world opinion concludes that American society could have acted hypocritically and willingly ignored the facts as do many other societies every day, but from the moment it dared discover the truth it could not escape drawing conclusions. It cannot knowingly retain a President who, according to the majority of its citizens, has violated the Constitution.

This, then, is the point of view that I heard expressed in conversations not only in Europe but also in India and Japan in recent months. For me it is beyond doubt that the impeachment of President Nixon would be felt everywhere as an irrefutable demonstration and almost supreme proof of the validity of the democratic system in the United States, and not the contrary.

Truly, the difficulty, when one

speaks with non-Americans, is generally to show them to what point the impeachment procedure would be an immense, painful and traumatizing process, and why very naturally American citizens and the House of Representatives hesitate so long before undertaking it.

But world public opinion no longer believes that Mr. Nixon's departure would damage American foreign policy.

The opening toward China and the Soviet Union, détente, the new spirit in relations with Latin America, the negotiations for peace in the Middle East are, in general appreciated, even if that is not readily admitted.

But no one believes that Secretary of State Kissinger would be put aside if Mr. Nixon were impeached. It cannot be seen why with Mr. Ford in the White House, and with control by Congress, the Secretary of State could not pursue his policies until 1976.

Anyway, most people outside the United States are convinced that for the last year Mr. Nixon has been entirely preoccupied with the problems of his personal defense and has neither the time nor the freedom of mind to conduct American foreign policy. The political argument of "reasons of state" versus impeachment no longer exists, they say.

They may be wrong or right, but what they think is that impeachment of the President in the present state of affairs would make a favorable impression in the world.

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