

# Ford's Concern About Nixon

Washington

Vice President Gerald Ford is deeply concerned that the impact of Watergate on President Nixon threatens the progress of U.S.-Soviet arms limitation talks.

Ford made his feelings known about what he regards as the most disturbing aspect of Watergate in an informal conversation with a small group of newsmen on board Air Force 2 returning from a speech in New York yesterday.

Ford stressed his continued confidence in and admiration for Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, whom he characterized as "a genius."

And he said he is still hopeful that Kissinger might somehow reach a satisfactory agreement with the Soviets which, Ford added, Mr. Nixon could then "exploit" politically.

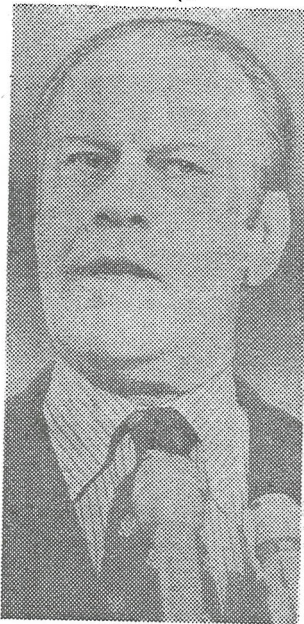
But the vice president indicated that he is worried that President Nixon lacks the political prestige to persuade Congress to increase spending on defense research and development if the Russians balk at disarmament concessions.

Under these circumstances, Ford speculated, the Russians might conclude they are under no pressure to give ground to the United States.

Ford said he had discussed these views with Kissinger but that he had not talked about them with President Nixon in such "categorical" terms.

Similar misgivings about Mr. Nixon's prospects in the forthcoming Moscow talks have been expressed, sometimes in stronger terms, on Capital Hill, in the diplomatic community here and by State Department officials, including Kissinger himself.

But this is the first time the vice president has talked so openly and candidly about his own trepidations



GERALD FORD  
An airplane chat

about the difficulties facing Mr. Nixon.

He initiated the discussion himself, coming forward from his private compartment to the section of the plane where reporters were seated. He was coatless but was still wearing the dress shirt and trousers he had donned for his appearance earlier before the Economic Club of New York.

In support of his worries, Ford cited Senate rejection Monday of an administration request for \$266 million in additional military aid for South Vietnam.

Because of the informal atmosphere the five newsmen, representing the Los Angeles Times, the three major television networks and the Voice of America, did not take notes during the 30-minute chat.

When the plane landed at Andrews Air Force Base here, they reconstructed the conversation from memory and agreed to omit from their stories comments which the Vice President had labeled off the record.

But the Vice President and his staff were evidently

taken by surprise when they learned yesterday afternoon that stories based on the plane conversation would be published and broadcast.

Ford then issued a brief statement giving his version of the conversation on the plane, which put the onus for potential diplomatic problems on Congress rather than on Mr. Nixon's weakened position.

"... In the present Watergate climate any votes by the Congress to cripple the defense budget or commitments to our allies make it much more difficult for the President to negotiate for peace," the statement said.

"We need and want a sound strategic arms limitation agreement with the Soviet Union. The best way to get a satisfactory agreement is to maintain the military strength of the United States which contributes a principal part of our diplomatic clout.

"Every vote by the Congress to undercut either our military posture or our credibility with our allies makes the President's task of negotiating agreement that much more difficult."

In his remarks on disarmament talks to newsmen Ford made no reference to the edited Watergate tape transcripts released last week by the White House

*Los Angeles Times*