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Washington Post Foreign Service

MOSCOW, June 25—Among the thousands of words being published in magazines and newspapers here these days to prepare the atmosphere for the upcoming meetings between President Nixon and Soviet Communist Party leader Leonid Brezhnev, one word is notably absent—Watergate.

In the opinion of knowledgeable Soviets, Watergate will not be mentioned in the leaders' private consultations on disarmament, Middle East peace, European security and trade.

"We believe in the old peasant tradition," one Soviet journalist remarked, "that it is wrong to bring up subjects that may be embarrassing to your guest."

The fact is that Watergate has never been considered a proper subject for public discussion here, and to the citizenry it remains a mystery. But expressed or not, it seems safe to say, the specter of Watergate will hang over these talks no matter how determinedly it is ignored by the participants themselves.

The consensus of interested Americans here and the Soviets they talk to is that "Summit '74" would have been very different if that break-in at the Watergate two years ago had not taken place.

A year ago, Mr. Nixon was still regarded here, despite his problems, as the best person to deal with in Washington—a friend of detente under attack from his political opponents, who were portrayed as opponents of better relations with Moscow.

Now, at least among some Soviet specialists, there is a growing belief that Mr. Nixon's days in office may be numbered and that in any event his ability to produce on any promises he makes has been sharply reduced. The purpose of having a summit this year, the Soviets have been saying, is not to break substantial new ground, but to "traditionalize" the principle of top-level meetings.

By this reasoning, the Soviets are intent on showing that summits can be routine—that improvements in Soviet-American relations can go forward no matter what happens in the United States. In effect, the Soviets opted for a summit with a beleaguered president rather than risk no summit at all.

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There are now some Soviet experts on the United States who have concluded that the overall pursuit of detente with Moscow is truly a bipartisan policy. Were the Nixon Administration to be replaced by Democrats, they say, there would still be impetus to continue the dialogue that has developed in the past three years.

One expert on American affairs who recently returned from Washington, where he spoke with Sen. Henry Jackson (D-Wash.), went so far as to describe the senator as "flexible" on

questions of Soviet-American relations. This position, however, is not common here. Jackson, the sponsor of an amendment to block trade advantages for the Soviets unless emigration policies are eased, is regularly pilloried in the Soviet press.

One observable consequence of Watergate is a new respect for, or at least interest in, the U.S. Congress among Soviet specialists in American affairs.

The June issue of U.S.A., the Soviet Union's leading journal on American affairs, contains two stern but non-polemical assessments of opposition to detente in the United States, particularly in Congress.

The articles assert that resistance to the "process of normalization" between Washington and Moscow has been increasing lately. But the authors conclude that, nonetheless, the summit talks will be "useful" and that "realism" will eventually prevail in Congress.

Last month, a delegation of Soviet "parliamentarians"—members of the Supreme Soviet, the nominal parliament—visited Washington for the first time. This is touted here as further evidence of broadening ties between the superpowers. Watergate or not, it is said, Soviet "legislators" can meet with their American counterparts.

To an American recently arrived from Washington, it is startling to discover the extent to which Watergate remains a puzzlement to the Soviets. The case has been discussed about a dozen times in the Soviet press during the past two years—never in detail—and even less has been said on radio or television.

Foreign radio stations like the Voice of America have broadcast news about the Watergate and its consequences, but this convoluted tale—difficult enough for Americans to follow—evidently becomes all but incomprehensible when translated into Russian.

One of the most urbane men in the Soviet Union remarked the other day that he had a ten-ruble bet with an equally sophisticated Russian friend that by the end of 1974, Richard Nixon would be ousted as president by Henry Kissinger.

Surely, the man said, as Mr. Nixon becomes weaker and the secretary of state stronger, such a turnabout is inevitable. The bettor was astonished to learn that he was an almost sure loser, if for no other reason that because barring a constitutional amendment, a naturalized citizen like Kissinger is ineligible for the top job.

Among those few Soviets who pride themselves on familiarity with Watergate's intricacies, there are theories on what it all means, just as there are in Washington. One such expert said that in his view, the United States is going through "a purge"—a cleansing of rot in the system. When it is all over, he said, the country would emerge newly fortified—and still in favor of detente.

WXPost

JUN 26 1974

# Top Unspoken Soviet Word Is 'Watergate'