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China's Suspicions Can't Be Ignored

By Stephen S. Rosenfeld

IF ONE IS to judge by Secretary of State Rogers' remarks this week, the Nixon administration has a curious and quite possibly mistaken notion of what it takes to "improve our relations with Communist China," as Mr. Rogers said the administration would like to do. "We think the way to do it is by small steps," he declared, "and we have taken now two unilateral steps which we think indicate our good faith."

No one among the putative minority in Washington which shares the Secretary's positive interest in Peking would want to dismiss the steps he referred to, concerning

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trade and travel. But to imply that such "small steps" can somehow lead the United States back the road it originally traveled by giant steps, is to seriously underestimate the scale of differences between Washington and Peking. To suggest that a showing of "good faith" on tidbits translates into businesslike dealings on fundamental security issues may be no less misleading.

That the Chinese are profoundly suspicious of the United States is by now part of the conventional wisdom. A whole mythology has grown up to explain Peking's wariness as some dark cultural or national trait setting China off from other states. From this springs the rather patronizing view, as expressed by Mr. Nixon in the campaign, for instance, that "we simply cannot afford to leave China forever outside the family of nations." Hence: "small steps" and displays of "good faith," as though China were a sulien unreasonable child needing to be lured out of protective reserve.

CHINA'S suspicions, to be sure, exist and cannot be ignored. Nor should they be made to bear the whole responsibility for a relationship soured in large part by actions of the United States itself. When the Communists took power in 1949, both they and the Americans accepted consular relations and, though distrustful, expected full relations to develop in reasonably short order. When North Korea attacked South Korea in 1950, however, Harry Truman's advisers panicked him and he dispatched the Seventh Fleet to the Formosa Straits (ostensibly to prevent the two navy-less Chinese regimes from setting upon each other). Mr. Truman also undertook a huge military buildup of the Nationalists on Taiwan. By this careless sequence did the United States stumble into the role of balancing or "containing" China and, incidentally, of sustaining the Nationalist minority as the government on Taiwan. This is the role that, finally, brought this country to Vietnam.

Granted, Mr. Nixon cannot undo two dec-

ades of history; he must cope with their results. Certainly one effective way to do so might be to tell the history like it is, thereby ministering not just to the suspicions of Chinese but the very real misgivings of Americans, a great many of whom are baffled and alarmed by any move their government makes toward the "enemy" in Peking. History aside, Mr. Nixon must be held accountable for the policies of his own presidency. It is precisely here that his administration's stated desire to "improve relations with China" falls short of real events.

In the military sphere, this administration has continued its predecessor's secret use of bases on Taiwan (manned by nearly 10,000 Americans) to support the Vietnam war, despite past assurance that the American military role on the island was strictly to defend it alone. Spy planes, rather than the less provocative spy satellites orbited over the Soviet Union, continue to be flown over China.

The Secretary of State may oppose House efforts to bestow an extra jet fighter squadron upon Nationalist China but the Secretary of Defense supports those efforts, and it should not take much reflection in Peking to decide which department customarily has the upper hand in China policy. The administration's ABM program offers another clue. However unprovocatively defensive it may seem to some Americans, it will appear to many Chinese as preparation for an American first strike. That Moscow and Washington evidently agree on their need for a China-oriented ABM, must feed Peking's darkest fears. The wish to improve ties with China goes in one direction; deployment of an anti-China ABM goes in the other. The administration has conceded the point in respect to Moscow; it denies it in respect to Peking.

POLITICALLY, Secretary Rogers' intriguing hint that the United States has not "yet" altered its opposition to Chinese Communist representation in the United Nations must be set against the administration's performance last month in again leading the fight to reject Peking.

Last month as well, in the agreement in which the United States relinquished Okinawa to Japan, Taiwan was defined publicly for the first time as "a most important factor for the security of Japan." This gratuitous inclusion of Taiwan, which all Chinese consider a province, handed Peking grounds for outrage and may also have injured Tokyo's useful bellwether attempts to increase trade and informal political contacts with the Communists, even while maintaining diplomatic relations with the Nationalists.

In the end, the best thing the administration's China policy may have going for it is Vietnam. That is, China is bound to pay far more attention to the whittling down of the 500,000-man American expeditionary force near its frontier than to symbolic "small steps" or professions of "good faith." The acquired American distaste for land war, if not for all war, in Asia may serve the mellowing purpose which in other circumstances might have been fulfilled by enlightened White House leadership. But the President still has a great deal to do: first of all, to decide whether he wants to keep military and political pressure on China, albeit at lower cost and risk to the United States, or really to improve relations with Peking. As the administration closes its first year, the question remains open.