

DATE OF FORD TRIP TO CHINA IN DOUBT

U.S. Aides Say Difficulties Have Arisen in Working Out Arrangements for Visit

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WASHINGTON, Nov. 4 — President Ford is having considerable difficulty arranging a date for his trip to China, originally planned for the end of this month, Administration officials acknowledged today.

At a news briefing today, the White House spokesman, Ron Nessen, explained the delay in announcing the Presidential visit as "just a lot of scheduling and technical issues being worked on." Reiterating what Mr. Ford said at his news conference last night, he declared: "The President anticipates and expects to go to Peking. I've heard of no change in plans."

Speculations about some deterioration in Chinese-American relations mounted yesterday when a White House advance team bound for Peking to prepare for the President's visit boarded their aircraft only to be told to debark just as the engines were warming.

Asked about this, Mr. Nessen said, "Well, I am told that there was some kind of mix-up on when they were supposed to go."

Message Sent to Peking

Other officials said that what Mr. Nessen described as a mix-up was more of a miscalculation about the extent of Chinese eagerness to settle the matter. Secretary of State Henry A. Kissinger, the officials said, sent a message to Peking on Friday, proposing a date to begin the visit and informing the Chinese that the President wanted to shorten his stay in China from five or six days to four. Plans were being developed for Mr. Ford to pay visits to Indonesia and the Philippines in the extra day or two.

Peking's reply was expected by Sunday but did not arrive until late yesterday, after the members of the advance party had returned to their offices on four-hour alert. Peking's note, according to the officials, rejected the date proposed by Washington and was said to be vague even about the visit itself.

Administration officials maintained that the trip itself was not in jeopardy and that the negotiations were, as Mr. Nessen said, over details. But they also made clear that in their judgment Peking would not haggle over these matters unless something more basic was troubling the Chinese leaders.

Different explanations were provided by various officials for the apparent difficulties, which developed during the course of Mr. Kissinger's chilly conversations in Peking two weeks ago.

Some officials, particularly in the Pentagon, referred to the Secretary's trip to China as a "disaster." They based their judgment almost entirely on the public lectures delivered by the Chinese on detente and by their repeated private warnings to Mr. Kissinger that he was being misled by Moscow in the negotiations on limitation of strategic arms and on Western Europe.

Ouster of Schlesinger Cited

To these officials, Mr. Ford's dismissal of Secretary of Defense James R. Schlesinger—regarded by Peking as the man in the Administration who best understood the Soviet threat—exacerbated this tension over Mr. Kissinger's policy of detente.

Other officials agreed that the detente policy was part of the problem, but said there were bound to be other factors that could only be guessed at, given the Chinese penchant for secrecy.

The officials said that these included internal Chinese political struggles, Chinese perceptions of the United States as a declining power, possible dissatisfaction over lack of further progress on settling the Taiwan issue and the recent clash between Indian and Chinese troops in the Himalayas.

These officials said it was obvious that Chinese-American relations were not improving, although they explained that a main issue that now divides the two nations—detente—also remains the basic common interest.

Mr. Kissinger's trip to China, one official said, showed that there was a lot to talk about but little to negotiate.

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*8:30 a.m., 2 Nov; announcement, evening, 3 Nov. (Evans, Novak, WXP 5 Nov.)