

President Nixon's Subtle Shifts

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WASHINGTON, Feb. 25—By word, by nuance and sometimes only by omission, President Nixon's second annual bulky compendium on the state of the world suggests some interesting things about the state of his mind and mood.

You have to dig hard through some long passages that read like either diplomatic communi-

qués or excerpts from these for Prof. Henry A. Kissinger's Har-

vard seminars. But there to be found are subtle and significant shifts in Presidential assertion:

¶There is Richard M. Nixon, once the favorite of the Nationalist old China lobby, referring deliberately a dozen times to the mainland Government by its own title, "the People's Republic of China" and describing that Government as understandably suspicious of foreigners and in any case belligerent "more often" in word than in deed. This marks quite a change from the days, still recent, when high officials refused even to

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honor the Communists' redesignation of their capital from Peiping to Peking. And it marks a still further evolution in Mr. Nixon's approach toward dealings with the mainland.

¶Striking, also, is Mr. Nixon's decision to drop last year's berating of the Russians for their assistance to North Vietnam and demands for help in ending the Indochina conflict. He suggests, in fact, that while wishing American influence everywhere reduced, Moscow may well want now to keep some American power in Asia to assist in the containment and distraction of its rival in Peking.

¶There are noteworthy passages in which Mr. Nixon, after frequent pledges "to end" the war in Vietnam, soberly concedes his critics' contention that his policy of Vietnamization can only reduce the American involvement while the South Vietnamese, Cambodians and Laotians fight on, with our help, "over a long period." In a hard-headed analysis of the conflict, the President further acknowledges that even at this late stage of the war, the real wishes and sympathies of the South Vietnamese people are hard to judge.

¶And this message finally grants that the Nixon doctrine, after much debate and even confusion in many governments, should be read primarily as a "philosophic attitude." Its many ambiguities were deliberately drawn and therefore prevent it from defining detailed policies, the President writes. In fact, he says the doctrine requires American commitment and engagement abroad as frequently as it portends withdrawal and disengagement.

From the details to which it is then attached in this elaborate document, it is clear that Mr. Nixon has no desire to diminish the nation's interests or commitments abroad, only to make them bearable and palatable at home.

He holds out a future in which more foreign troops and American dollars can replace American draftees in the defense of those interests, but goes to some length to assure restive patrons and possibly calculating adversaries that the

United States is not growing weary or isolationist.

That is why he is giving higher priority to the way in which the Vietnam war is ended than to the ending itself, Mr. Nixon writes, and why he risked grave confrontation in the Middle East last year by threatening intervention in the defense of Jordan against Syria.

And by the way of explaining his conviction that peace everywhere depends in good measure on the power and reliability of the United States, Mr. Nixon said in his radio talk about his message that "one good reason why other nations take us at our word in the Middle East is because the United States has kept its word in Southeast Asia."

Mr. Nixon's central faith in the benign influence of American power and prestige around the globe leads his message toward a clear bias for big-power balances. He accepts the Soviet move into the Middle East in the last two decades and argues only for a stable balance of big-power interests there and against single-power predominance. He envisions a four-power balance in the Pacific—among the United States, the Soviet Union, Japan and Communist China—and promises Peking "full scope for the influence to which China's achievements entitle it."

Clearly the darkest cloud on the President's world horizon is the fear that the Soviet Union will reject mere balance in arms, in the Middle East or other vital sectors.

He begs the Russians not to misunderstand the strategic balance of power or the strong American interest in weapons stability. Quit probing or testing American tolerance, as in the Middle East or Cuba, he says. Don't think we are withdrawing into isolation. Don't try to score small tactical gains while we seem preoccupied. Don't think we can't or won't spend and spend to match any further major arms build-up.

The President obviously wants to present himself as both tough and reasonable to the Soviet leaders, who will meet in solemn Congress next month to compose their own version of the world. To impress them, he acknowledges, he needs to be respected and trusted elsewhere abroad and among his own people. And that is what this very big pitch seems designed to achieve.

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