

White House Has Trouble Convincing

By MAX FRANKEL

WASHINGTON, Sept. 22—Because the White House refuses to say even in the most general terms when President Nixon hopes to make his trip to China, it has had some trouble convincing reporters that he will not slip off secretly one morning, as his aide Henry A. Kissinger did last July. The few

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about the preparations and who officials who know something are willing to wink and grunt—though not speak—on the subject suggest that Mr. Nixon and the Peking Government have settled on sometime early next year, without fixing a date.

The extraordinary secrecy honors a pledge to the Chinese by Mr. Kissinger and reflects a fear at the White House that any premature discussion of the journey could jeopardize what the President regards as a major political as well as diplomatic achievement.

Presumably, there is now considerable concern at the White House that unforseen political events in China could upset the trip. Officials throughout the Government have been ordered to say as little as possible about the current signs of political change or unrest in Peking—the kind of evidence that would normally have inspired the most elaborate speculations among analysts here.

Suspicions that Mr. Nixon might slip away with just a handful of reporters in his plane were aroused by his plan to travel all the way to Alaska this weekend for a brief meeting with Emperor Hirohito of Japan. A secret trip would have the advantage of cutting out the several hundreds of newsmen, photographers and technicians who want to make the China trip but simply cannot be accommodated in Peking.

Ronald L. Ziegler, the White House press secretary, promised today that the trip would be announced in advance at "the appropriate time" and that the reporters covering Mr. Nixon "will be the first to know publicly." Apparently persuasive evidence that the trip would not occur next week was the further announcement that Mr. Nixon would receive Andrei A. Gromyko, the Soviet Foreign Minister, at the White House next Wednesday afternoon.

This week's large bombing raids of North Vietnam—at least the fourth of such magnitude since the United States

suspended the regular bombing of the North nearly three years ago—evoked relatively little outcry from the customary critics of war policy in Congress. The restraint attests to the President's success in once again dampening public opposition, through the prospect of further troop withdrawals and the larger turn in China policy.

Behind the resolve here to bomb North Vietnam just often enough to prevent major troop concentrations during the period of American withdrawal lies a consensus among the President's top advisers that both the political and tactical risks of

gradual disengagement are now much smaller than would be the risks of seeking a political settlement at the Paris negotiations.

No one will concede in so many words that the negotiations have been written off, but that is said to be the tone of private discussions inside the Administration. The withdrawal of most American troops over the next year, while American aid, advice and air power continue to assist in the protection of South Vietnam, is thought to be the most defensible possible posture, both militarily and in Mr. Nixon's re-election campaign.

Officials want to maintain the Paris contact with Hanoi and still hope some day to use that forum to arrange for a prisoner exchange, but they have little expectation of a tidier outcome. The timing of the final and total American withdrawal has been subtly disengaged from the prisoner issue in official statements so that the issue can be further insulated from North Vietnamese moves in Paris.

The ardor of Senate doves for a full-scale investigation of the origins of the Vietnam War appears to have diminished along with excitement

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Reporters That President

over the Pentagon papers. Indeed, observers of Congress detect a general ennui among the legislators. No big fights are expected on the anti-missile system or any other matter in sight. The fate of the economy, both at home and internationally, is recognized as the overriding issue, but not one on which Mr. Nixon will be challenged until later stages of the 1972 campaign.

At the Democratic National Committee, there is an expectation, nourished by hope, that Mr. Nixon will alienate new groups of voters through his economic controls. At the party headquarters there is

also considerable speculation that Mayor Lindsay would accept, and may in fact be eager for, the Vice-Presidential nomination rather than top spot on the ticket of his newly adopted party.

Among Republican political strategists, there no longer appears much concern that Gov. Ronald Reagan of California and his conservative admirers represent much of a threat to the President's party standing in 1972. Vice President Agnew and Attorney General John N. Mitchell, who will manage Mr. Nixon's campaign, have become close friends of Mr. Reagan, who is now a frequent visitor at

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the San Clemente White House. And Caspar W. Weinberger, Deputy Director of the Office of Management and Budget, who was once the Governor's Finance Director and state party chairman, has devoted a great deal of time to mediating disputes between Mr. Reagan and the national Administration.