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The China Negotiations, From a Hope to Reality

By TAD SZULC

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WASHINGTON, Feb. 14—On Friday, Feb. 20, 1970, the United States conveyed to China in secrecy a proposal from President Nixon that a senior Administration official travel to Peking as a demonstration of the American seriousness about improving relations between the two countries.

This proposal marked the opening of the active phase in the long diplomatic process that is to culminate next Monday with President Nixon's arrival in Peking, two years and a day after he first offered the Chinese a high-level political contact.

The Nixon message—stating that the President wished to send a personal representative to Peking and asking whether this would be agreeable to the Chinese leadership—was presented by Walter J. Stoessel Jr., the American Ambassador to Poland, to Lei Yang, the Chinese charge d'affaires, in the course of an hour-long meeting at the United States Embassy in Warsaw.

But the final affirmative reply, transmitted through a different confidential channel, came almost 14 months later, in the first half of April, 1971, setting the stage for the secret visit to Peking in July by Henry A. Kissinger, the President's adviser on national security.

Mr. Kissinger and Premier Chou En-lai worked out the agreement leading to the joint announcement by Washington and Peking that President Nixon would go to China "at an appropriate date before May, 1972."

Except for a few tantalizing remarks in Mr. Nixon's State of the World Message in Congress last week, about unidentified "mutually friendly countries" helpful in the Chinese-American rapprochement, the Administration remains secretive about all the channels and contacts involved in the various stages of the preliminary negotiations. But private interviews in the Presidential entourage and a close study of the Administration's public utterances on the subject over the last three years have permitted at least a partial reconstruction of this diplomatic process.

It has confirmed the long-held belief here that the heads of state of France, Rumania and Pakistan have played key roles in what Mr. Nixon called in



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Walter J. Stoessel Jr., U.S. Ambassador to Poland, had a part in preparing for the conference.

his policy report the "period of cautious exploration and gathering confidence" between the United States and China, and, subsequently, in practical arrangements.

However, the record shows that the first step toward improving relations was taken by Peking on Nov. 26, 1968, in publicly proposing that the Warsaw ambassadorial talks, interrupted since Jan. 8 of that year, be resumed in February, 1969, one month after President Nixon's inauguration.

Mr. Nixon, as President-elect, accepted the Chinese suggestion for the two countries to resume the ambassadorial conversations—the only direct link between Washington and Peking. They had been held on and off since 1955.

American diplomats were particularly interested at the time in Peking's invitation for a discussion in Warsaw over a possible agreement on the "five principles of peaceful coexistence." This was seen here as a signal of moderation from China as she emerged from the Cultural Revolution of 1966-67.

The meeting planned for February, 1969, in Warsaw was never held because of a sudden dispute over a Chinese diplomatic defector in the Netherlands to whom the United States promised asylum, but the Nixon Administration quietly went ahead with its efforts to establish some form of dialogue with Peking.

"Within two weeks of my inauguration I ordered that efforts be undertaken to communicate our new attitude through private channels, and to seek contract with the People's Republic of China," Mr. Nixon recalled last week in his report.

The President undertook this task personally in France during his first European tour when he met on March 1, 1969, with President de Gaulle at the Grand Trianon Palace in Versailles.

Administration sources have indicated in recent private conversations that de Gaulle agreed to transmit Mr. Nixon's views to Peking.

In the course of a world tour in the summer of 1969, Mr. Nixon conferred with Gen. Agha Mohammad Yahya Khan, then Pakistan's President, and Rumania's President, Nicolae Ceausescu, taking up in considerable detail the question of Chinese-American relations.

Simultaneously, Administration spokesmen began voicing with growing frequency the American hopes for better relations with Peking, and the first steps were taken to remove restrictions on China in the fields of trade and travel.

In the autumn of 1969, the United States and China, in Mr. Nixon's words, "settled upon a reliable means of communication." He did not explain, but this was a foreign channel through which, late in October, word came that Peking was again ready to resume the talks in Warsaw.

The first diplomatic contact came on Dec. 3. Then on Dec. 12, Ambassador Stoessel met formally with Mr. Lei, the Chinese charge d'affaires. This was the first direct contact with China since Mr. Nixon took office.

On Jan. 8, 1970, the two governments announced that the ambassadorial negotiations would resume later in the month. In making the announcement, the State Department spokesman, Robert J. McCloskey, referred for the first time publicly to the Peking Government by its official name, the People's Republic of China. This was said to have been a calculated signal to the Chinese.

A meeting was held in Warsaw on Jan. 20, 1969, and the next one was called for Feb. 20. On the eve of the February meeting, Ambassador Stoessel pointedly said in a television interview that he would pursue President Nixon's goal of "improved practical relations" with Peking.

The next day, Mr. Stoessel reportedly surprised Mr. Lei with the Nixon message proposing that a high-level emis-

sary be dispatched to China. The Chinese reply was expected to be delivered at the Warsaw meeting scheduled for May 20, but the United States incursion in Cambodia and several other foreign policy situations led Peking to cancel the session on May 19.

Three weeks later, however, Premier Chou was reported to have told Emil Bodnaras, the visiting Deputy Premier of Rumania, that China hoped the talks with the United States could be resumed soon.

President Nixon wrote in his report last week that "by the fall of 1970, in private and reliable diplomatic channels, the Chinese began to respond" to the continuing American encouragement demonstrated through new trade and travel concessions.

These responses came chiefly through the Rumanian and Pakistani Presidents, both Mr. Ceausescu and General Yahya Khan visited the White House in October, 1970, before their respective trips to Peking and both carried oral messages from Mr. Nixon.

President Yahya Khan was in Peking between Nov. 10 and 15. Edgar Snow, the American writer who was in China late in 1970, said in an article describing his meeting with Chairman Mao Tse-tung in December that "go-betweens" were delivering messages from Washington to Peking.

On Oct. 26, the day after he received the Pakistani President at the White House, Mr. Nixon conferred at length with President Ceausescu, again with emphasis on China. The Rumanian Deputy Premier, Gogu Radulescu, met with Premier Chou in Peking late in November.

Early in 1971, the quiet exchange continued. Mr. Radulescu was again in Peking on March 22, and informed diplomats said he again served as a vital channel.

As President Nixon described this final period, "the spring of 1971 saw a series of orchestrated public and private steps which culminated in Dr. Kissinger's July trip to Peking and the agreement for me to meet with the leaders of the People's Republic of China."

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