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**Tom Braden**

## Nixon's Peking move is smart, but he might face a bad trip

WASHINGTON —The first mark of a smart politician is to know where he is going. Richard Nixon is a very smart politician and while everybody was watching him stew in his own juice over the North Vietnamese offer to return our prisoners of war, he knew he was going to China.

The second mark of a smart politician is that he knows appearance counts. Richard M. Nixon's appearance promises to look awfully good next spring. About the time Sens. Muskie and McGovern and a congressman named McCloskey are slogging through New Hampshire, Richard M. Nixon is going to be slogging through China. Whose appearance will be noticed most?

The third mark of a smart politician is that he never lets ideology stand in the way of business. "We have made the mistake of taking advice from men who knowingly or unknowingly came to the false conclusion that Chinese Communists were somehow different from other Communists," said Richard M. Nixon in 1952. He also said, "I can foresee no situation in which the United States could ever change its mind about recognizing Red China." Smart politicians don't need long memories. They never look back.

But there is a fourth characteristic of a smart politician and it is here that Richard Nixon's announcement of his trip to China may not be the unqualified tour de force it now seems.

Smart politicians take big risks. Richard Nixon's trip could be a bad trip, to borrow a phrase from the language of the young, with hallucinations in store for all concerned.

Can he be sure that the Chinese will exert pressure on North Vietnam to permit the co-existence of a non-Communist South Vietnam? Or that they can?

Can he be sure—despite his protestations that the trip "is not directed against any other nation"—that Mr. Brezhnev and Mr. Kosygin will smile benignly upon our new two China policy? If the Russians turn ugly, what happens to the Strategic Arms Limitations Talks and to hopes for cooperation in the Middle East?

This is no longer a game of Ping-Pong.

We are entering into negotiations with a nation which by 1980 promises to become a nuclear power of a magnitude with ourselves. If we ask this power to help us in Vietnam, is it not possible that we shall be asked to give up something in return?

But in the meantime a lot of old baggage has been tossed overboard. Spiro Agnew, who condemned Ping-Pong diplomacy, is off shuffling between dictators. Obviously Mr. Agnew is overboard. So is the fiction that the secretary of state commands foreign policy in this administration. Mr. Nixon once said it was "a cheap shot" for Sen. Stuart Symington to suggest that Henry Kissinger was more powerful than Secretary Rogers. A smart politician never worries about such old baggage.

Such as plans, still under study, for "taking out the Chinese nuclear capability." The CIA and the Defense Department seriously pondered such a plan in the early '60s when it would have been easy—with a few well-placed bombs—to ensure that the balance of terror would remain one to one. It was taken for granted then that the way to keep the peace was between two powers, not among three. Smart politicians always reexamine what is taken for granted. From that point, nothing is certain. Until that point, nothing is possible. Richard Nixon knows this—and it is a very smart thing to know.