

Damascus Weighs the Benefits And Drawbacks of a Nixon Visit

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DAMASCUS, Syria, June 3— Syria is weighing the political consequences of the possible visit of President Nixon to this country.

Knowledgeable Arab diplomatic sources said today that while no decision had yet been made on whether Syria would agree to a visit by Mr. Nixon, there was a distinct possibility that he would come. They said that if a visit was arranged, it would be about June 16.

Mr. Nixon is scheduled to visit other Middle Eastern countries before he goes to Moscow late in the month for meetings with Soviet leaders.

According to the sources, Syria has received unmistakable indications from Washington that Mr. Nixon would like to visit Damascus to meet President Hafez al-Assad. President Assad, they said, is believed favorably inclined toward a visit.

The absence of formal relations between Syria and the United States is not an unsurmountable barrier to a Nixon visit, according to Arab and Western diplomats. The political ramifications the visit would have for Syria, they said, were far more serious and delicate.

On the negative side, a Nixon visit would annoy some members of Syria's Baath party,

which is headed by President Assad. The Baathists approved the disengagement agreement with Israel, but are wary about United States intentions in the settlement of remaining Middle Eastern problems.

A Nixon visit would also be expected to be greeted with some hostility among Palestinian leaders in Syria, many of whom are said to consider the United States to be still a staunch ally of Israel.

Factors favorable to a visit are said to include the possibility of Syria's eventual acceptance of economic aid from the United States. While a presidential visit would not guarantee such aid, it is considered likely to create an atmosphere that would improve prospects for it.

A Nixon visit, the Arab sources said, would also strengthen relations between Syria and Egypt. President Anwar al-Sadat of Egypt is not seen, sometimes with skepticism among Arabs, as the principal new friend of the United States in the Arab world, they said. The Egyptian President, it is reported, would welcome a show of friendship toward Washington from another prestigious Arab nation such as Syria.

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