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Detente and Nixon



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TRYING to keep certain subjects and certain people out of presidential campaigns will get you nowhere.

Senator Alan Cranston (Dem-Calif.) and Senator Howard Baker (Rep-Tenn.) thought they could keep "peace through strength" — formerly known as detente — out of the election-year discussion. They were routed.

President Ford, through his press secretary, sought to erase Richard Nixon's China report from the public mind at the same time its existence was being revealed. They didn't do much better.

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CRANSTON, an earnest liberal who is suspected of harboring unkind thoughts about detente's stern critic, Senator Henry M. Jackson (Dem-Wash.) and Baker, who would like Mr. Ford to focus on him as a vice presidential candidate, hoped perhaps that Jackson and Ronald Reagan might be shamed into silence by Senate reproach.

But what happened was that Jackson, showing exceptional agility, signed on as a co-sponsor, which made the resolution meaningless for a lot of people.

Senator Lawton Chiles (Dem-Fla.) extricated all from the galloping embarrassment of the afternoon by suggesting the whole bundle be consigned to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee.

It was a sad end for a venture that had been planned as a lovely surprise

for Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, who, in Boston not long ago, castigated election-year critics of his policy.

Mr. Ford's press secretary, Ron Nessen, tried to disengage the White House from Richard Nixon and his China report by a full "confession." Nessen described how the report had been treated like a letter-bomb. It was gotten out before anyone knew it was there. If Time magazine hadn't spilled the beans, we might never have known about it.

Promising "no more mysteries," Nessen uncovered the hitherto unknown "functionary" who deals with the former president. Warren Gullett, special assistant to the military assistant to the President, flew to San Clemente to pick up two copies of the 60-page account of Nixon's journey. Kissinger got one copy; the President got the other.

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BOTH COPIES were later mailed back to San Clemente. Nixon had loaned, not given them, apparently. Nobody told Nessen who was receiving daily queries from the press about it.

Few things concern the White House more than Nixon, who, when the primaries are over, looms as a more menacing problem than "peace through strength." He brings back Watergate, the pardon, Ford's long fealty, and continuing commerce.

You can't keep him out of the election. Or detente, either.