

# Rejecting Option Three

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WASHINGTON, Aug. 18—No one has ever been more awaited than Japan by President Nixon's opponents—his proposed visit to Peking and his new economic policies. So Japanese officials here are ruefully quipping that what happens twice may happen three times.

It might be that. It's never wise to predict too much about a President on the basis of past performance, as if he were a race horse or a quarter-back. Yet a pattern is to be found in these two major decisions—each of truly historic dimensions—that is too interesting to be overlooked.

In the first place, each decision represented a total reversal of a deeply held attitude. As candidate and President, of course, Mr. Nixon dropped certain routine suggestions that he wished to improve Chinese-American relations, and it is now clear that he and Dr. Kissinger

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worked assiduously to help bring about the beginning thaw. Nevertheless, Mr. Nixon virtually built his career on anti-Communism; that career really got its start in the hysterical American political atmosphere following the "loss" of China, and few politicians of the cold war era were more intensely opposed to dealing with the Chinese Communists than Richard Nixon.

Specifically, the President has been long and bitterly opposed to wage-price controls in any form—an opposition that, among others, and friends, traced to disillusioning personal experience as a low-level Government functionary in the World War II price control program. As have most other serious political leaders, moreover, Mr. Nixon has spoken in the past as the "gold standard" of the dollar has been followed as motherhood and apple pie for merely suggesting that a change might someday have to be considered, former Treasury Secretary Kennedy fell out of favor early in the Administration.

The second element of the pattern is that when Mr. Nixon chose, or was forced, to change his mind, in each case he did not edge, slip or back into some slight mutation of his old policy. Not so in the current White House

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proposal, and he has split the middle of an already split line.

There is a catch, all the way around. He is now not only joining the Chinese leadership in the U.N. or sending a high official mission, he is going to "soften" his hard-line economic policy. He is not going to "soften" his hard-line policy on the dollar. He is not going to "soften" his hard-line effect, though.

Third, Mr. Nixon made no effort in either case to soften or soften what must be one of the most complete reversals of policy in Presidential history—not for him the broken evasion of a Lyndon Johnson, bombing North Vietnam and claiming to change from President Eisenhower's policy. Mr. Nixon immediately cleared before television cameras and, indeed, even a little boldly—saying to Peking was to be a "promise for peace" and the top-line reality for the most comprehensive of our foreign policies.

Finally, those of us who have been the critics of Mr. Nixon—even those conservative critics who insisted on the China deal—ought to admit that both of these decisions took courage. Mr. Nixon, at the time, leaves the President with a messy wage-price controlling situation in his hands for the next year; the net political result could be badly damaging to his reelection prospects.

Nevertheless, enough. This pattern stretches to cover at least one other big Nixon decision—the invasion of Cambodia. That was not quite of the same magnitude as the later two and was more a reversal of established policy than of a deep-seated personal conviction. There was, nevertheless, no "option three" but a complete turnabout from tolerating the Cambodian sanctuary to an across-the-board attack on all of them. The decision was promptly celebrated on television, and it also took a certain courage—of the hardy courage some of us would say.

None of this necessarily means anything for the future, but the pattern does suggest that in the largest policy questions Mr. Nixon will not necessarily be limited by his past views, and that he is capable of the most sweeping change. It suggests also that he is a big-stakes gambler, and one well aware of his Presidential powers to impress the American people with large undertakings.

What may be most interesting about this pattern is that the corrosive and degenerating situation in Vietnam may yet demand of Richard Nixon—for better or for worse, by the Cambodian or the Chinese precedent—the kind of big, tough, risky turnabout decision he has shown the world he is willing to make.