

Helen Thomas (UPI; second question of the press conference): Mr. President, Robert Strauss has suggested that it might behoove you to ask former President Nixon to postpone or cancel his trip to China. There are also reports that you're unhappy because it coincides with the New Hampshire primary. Do you have any plans to ask him to put off the trip?

Ford: I have no such plans. Mr. Nixon is going to the People's Republic of China as a private citizen at the invitation of that government. I don't believe, for any alleged political purposes, that I should intervene with the invitation of a foreign government to have a private American citizen visit that country.

Thomas: Do you think that - the Chinese government sends a special plane which lands at a military airport, asks for the top media in this country to cover him (some twenty representatives), you send your special briefing books on the change in leadership - and it still is a private trip in their eyes?

Ford: Well, let me answer several of those questions. You've asked a good many of them. First, there has been no special briefing given to Mr. Nixon. He has received periodic briefings or information concerning world affairs from the national or federal government, there was no special briefing given to him in relationship to this trip. Whether or not he [sic] will land at a civilian or a military airport has not been determined. It's a decision on the part of the Chinese government as to where they would like to land and they have to ask us which of several airports. If and when we get a specific request we'll act on it.

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Tom de Frank (Newsweek; 13th question): Mr. President, following up on Helen's questions, you were asked about the Nixon trip last weekend and you said in part that it was, quote, "wholesome and healthy" for private citizens to make these [sorts of?] trips to China. You've mentioned again tonight that former President Nixon is going as a private citizen. With all due respect, Richard Nixon isn't exactly your run of the mill private citizen. I'd like to ask if you really think it's wholesome and healthy for the conduct of American foreign policy for Mr. Nixon to be making this trip?

Ford: He's not going there involving any foreign policy matters. He's going as a guest of the Chinese government, and he's going as a private citizen. He hasn't had any special briefings. He's going under the guidelines that I've suggested.

de Frank: You see no complications at all to foreign policy in his trip?

Ford: None whatsoever.

[Complete]