

Great Potential Of Nixon Trip

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In "the making of the President 1968" Theodore White records a comment by Richard Nixon on the function of the American presidency.

"I have always thought this country could run itself domestically without a President," he said. "All you need is a competent cabinet to run

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the country at home. You need a Presidential policy, no secretary of state is really important.

The President makes foreign policy."

In one dramatic stroke, Mr. Nixon has now demonstrated the truth of that vision of the presidency in foreign affairs. His announcement that he will visit Peking reminds us that, in the American system, only the President can ultimately speak for his country abroad. Only he has the vision and the political power to change the old assumptions—to deal in the large with a changing world.

It is that has instantly lit the world's imagination. One has only to list some questions that come to mind to recognize the potential of the Nixon trip.

VISIT

Could the president conceivably visit Peking if, at the time, Americans were still fighting in Vietnam and bombing northern Laos, not far from the Chinese border? or does the agreement on his trip necessarily imply that Mr. Nixon and the Chinese leaders at least see the possibility of an end to the war now?

Is it significant that the Chinese government has just changed its attitude toward the Paris peace talks. When they began, in 1968, Peking was against North Vietnam even sitting down to talk with the Americans. But lately it has shown strong interest in a negotiated settlement, endorsing the new Viet Cong proposal.

Did Henry Kissinger, in his extraordinary 20 hours of talks with premier Chou En-Lai, explore Chinese ideas on a settlement? Is the way open for presidential diplomacy?

WAR

Peking has not said that the Vietnam war is an absolute obstacle to correct Sino-American relations. The one such obstacle, in the view maintained for a generation now, is American support for Chiang Kai-Shek's nationalist government on Taiwan. And so more questions present themselves.

Is some way out of the Taiwan dilemma emerging, some accommodation of our commitment to Chiang with Peking's commitment to One China? And what about American opposition to Peking as the sole Chinese member of the United Nations? Is there some new give in this area?

It would be foolish to assume that solutions are at hand for such old and bitter problems. But it is just as hard to believe that the People's Republic of China would welcome President Nixon unless there were at a minimum the promise of some movement on these questions. One diplomat put it in the form of a skeptical question:

"Does Chou En-Lai like Richard Nixon enough to

help make him President for four more years just out of good fellowship?"

HOPE

But the President's announcement raises a hope even broader than the possibility of peace in Vietnam and normal Sino-American relations. That is the hope of a comprehensive political settlement in Asia.

Of course it is foolish to build great baroque dream castles in diplomacy. But there is a realistic basis for large-scale understanding between China and the United States — the different interests of the two countries.

China's first interest is Taiwan. Her fundamental disagreement with the Soviet Union makes her want powerful friends. Beyond that, Peking wants to resume a prominent role in world politics. To achieve any of those vital interests, she really must deal with the United States.

For the United States, getting out of the Vietnam morass is the first priority. Then we may have learned the impossibility of trying on our own, at our distance, to impose a stable political pattern on Asia. To do these things we need an accommodation with China — if she is, as we have begun to think, a China concerned primarily

for her own national integrity and development, not with external expansion.

TRIP

The announcement of the trip hardly solves the problems, and indeed it involves dangers. A specific one is the risk of upsetting Japanese politics. More generally, by announcing the trip a long but indefinite time in advance, Mr. Nixon may have given something of a hostage to fortune — for any act of his that made Peking break off the arrangements would be devastating to him.

But it is a time for hope, and in a strange way for the American domestic scene as well as foreign affairs. Even the beginning of success in this venture could end the long night of recrimination in the United States and restore the old faith and optimism. That, too, is an inescapable function of presidential leadership.