

Nixon's sudden diplomacy startles Tokyo and Peking

by James Reston

TOKYO — In this part of the world, officials don't quite know what to make of President Nixon. They understand and even approve the logic of his moves in defense of the dollar and for better relations with China, but they don't understand his timing, his tactics or his style.

In Peking, they thought he was almost too complimentary about China's big-power role in the world. "We are not a superpower but still an underdeveloped country," they said. In Tokyo, they thought he was too sudden and too insensitive in the way he launched his new China and new economic policies.

Both places, officials seemed to be troubled by questions of manner and style. Peking was obviously pleased that Nixon wanted to come to Peking and talk things over, and Tokyo knew something had to be done about Washington's domestic and foreign economic difficulties, but why the dramatic moves

in the night, the startling economic announcements without prior consultation?

In a way, both capitals pay the United States a compliment by their criticism. They have both been on the fringes of world affairs in recent years. In different ways, they think of Washington as the center of world politics, even if they don't always agree. But these sudden lunges by Nixon into Peking, into Cambodia and Laos, and into a wholly new economic policy make them wonder.

Peking reacted to Nixon's overtures with calculated calm. They printed the spare official communique about the President's visit and then ignored it. The Tokyo government, but not the Japanese press, or opposition politicians, played the whole thing down.

But both Peking's indifference and the Tokyo government's elaborate calm about recent developments are probably

highly misleading, and each in its own way has a grievance which is expressed more in private than in public.

Peking's grievance is that Washington, by the melodramatic Kissinger visit to Peking gave the impression that it was about to "normalize" diplomatic relations with China, and then announced a "two-China" policy in the United Nations, which it must have known could not possibly be the basis for "normal relations" with Peking.

More than that, since the Kissinger visit, the Peking officials feel that Wash-

ington has reacted to the predictable complaints of Japan and Taiwan as if the President had not expected opposition from these quarters when he sent Kissinger to Peking in the first place.

Secretary of State Rogers' speech to the American Legion in Houston illustrates what troubles both Peking and Tokyo. "The drama of the developments in our policy toward Peking and the strains of recent imbalances in United States-Japanese trade," Rogers said, "have to some extent partially obscured the fundamental significance of United States ties to Japan."

But in both Peking and Tokyo, the point is being made that Washington arranged "the drama of developments" in Washington-Peking relations and must have known that this would upset the Tokyo government, just as the Presi-

dent's new economic policy suddenly startled the political and business community in Japan.

In this part of the world, as at home, there may be a certain admiration for the Nixon Administration's ability to announce dramatic diplomatic and economic policies which reverse the policies of the past, but these sudden switches also raise serious doubts.

Why was the potential power of China, and the developing economic crisis in the U.S. not faced long before?

Why have a U.S.-Japanese cabinet committee to review relations between the two countries and call it into session only after the U.S. has startled not only Japan but the world with a policy that repudiates Washington's trade and monetary policies of the past?

More than most people, Asians don't like to be surprised. They may bow in Tokyo, as is their custom, when they are reversed by a nation on whom they depend for military and economic security, but their official courtesy and acquiescence are probably misleading.

The problem here in Tokyo and to a lesser extent in Peking after all this is that officials don't quite know what to expect next. Maybe the Democrats and even the "regular" Republicans are in the same boat. They recognize the problems and even admire the President's willingness to reverse and even defy his past policies and principles, but they are left without much confidence about where we all go from here.

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NYTimes version (3 Sep 71) includes as final paragraph:

This is really the problem now in Asia so far as its future relations with Washington are concerned. Mr. Nixon has demonstrated his flexibility and his pragmatism, but where will this lead next month or next year? These are the private questions one hears in Tokyo and Peking, and they are stated in private much more strongly than in public.