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Internal strife complicates Nixon trip to Red China

WASHINGTON — With the arrival of the Peking diplomats in New York, the Nixon Administration is beginning to put aside its disappointment over the Taiwan issue and adjust to the new realities of dealing with Mainland China.

Much remains to be done in preparation for President Nixon's trip to Peking. The

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agenda for his talks with Chou En Lai and other Chinese officials has not yet been completed. In fact the Communist government is apparently once more in turmoil, with the line of political succession still very much in doubt. This has introduced an element of confusion, if not of doubt, into the arrangements.

Also, it may give some notion of China's isolation to remember that the section of the Peking foreign office that deals with the United States is known as "the Australian, Western Europe and American Division." Most of the Chinese in the Peking delegation have never been in the U.S. before, so the immediate concern of officials here is to provide for their security and do whatever they can to make the transition into the New York community as comfortable as possible.

Even so, this initial period of transition places some delicate problems before the U.S. and Chinese governments. There may not be "two Chinas" in the United Nations, but there are still "two Chinas" in the U.S., with an aggrieved and even bitter Taiwan mission here in Washington, supported by many loyal followers who resent the arrival of the men from Peking.

Transitional period

Dealing with Moscow and Tokyo in this transitional period will be almost as difficult as dealing with Peking and Taiwan. Nixon has to go to Moscow after his trip to Peking, and probably to Tokyo next summer, so while seeking the "normalization of relations" with the new China, he has to be careful not to appear to do so at the expense of U.S. relations with Japan and the Soviet Union.

After all, important as China is, the question of controlling the arms race, avoiding war in the Middle East, and keeping the lid on Berlin, are essentially Washington-Moscow problems, and the question of organizing a new monetary and trade policy in the world is more important in Japan and Europe, at this point of history, than in China.

Accordingly, Washington is now approaching these questions with less drama and speed than it did in the initial stages of its new China and new economic policies. It is more conscious now of the need for closer consultation with the Soviets and the Japanese, and it is beginning to protect itself on the home front by warning that the Nixon mission to Peking is just the beginning of a very long and complicated process and that it would be unwise to expect too much from

a single visit.

This is a much more realistic attitude than the sudden diplomacy out of Washington in recent months. Nixon's opening to Peking is still regarded by both parties and most observers here as a wise, bold, and historic stroke, but it has created some tension in both governments and started a process of reappraisal in most of the capitals of Asia and Europe, so the tempo has been reduced here to give everybody time to adjust.

Modest expectations

Fortunately, Chou En Lai seems to agree that this is a time for modest expectations. He told the managing editor of Tokyo's Asahi Shimbun the other day: "We must be very cautious. This does not mean that we lack self-confidence; it means that caution is required, and that we must not be indiscreet or haphazard." Earlier, he said in another interview: "we do not expect a settlement of all questions at one stroke. That is not possible. That would not be practicable. But by contacting one another, we may be able to find out from where we should start in solving these problems."

That is now precisely the new modest approach of the White House and the State Department. On the testimony of Peking officials, Henry Kissinger has approached them in this vein in his preparations for Nixon's trip, and now, with senior officials of the government of China in New York, a new line of communication has been opened for quiet and careful discussion of common problems.

This is one illustration of the practical function of the United Nations in New York. There were many arguments against locating the world organization in the commercial capital of one of the major nations of the world, but there are some advantages.

It is big enough to swallow even the U.N., and to permit private discussion of even the most sensitive international questions. Which is perhaps another way of saying that only in mass and diversity, can diplomats elude reporters in a Democratic society, and maybe this is not always a bad idea.

For through the U.N., even though Peking and Washington are a very long way from establishing normal diplomatic relations, they now have an instrument for negotiations, if both sides choose to use it. It will be a long time before Peking and Washington move from hostility to understanding — maybe as long as their 21-year separation — and Peking's moralistic and ideological approach to world politics may very well make them more difficult than the Soviets and the Soviet vetoes at the U.N. over the past 25 years, but at least there is a change in attitude. There is a new private avenue for negotiations, and a new opportunity for the Chinese to observe the west in New York. And if they can adjust to "fun city" who knows, they might even be able to help bring some kind of common sense into this distracted world.