Kevin P. Phillips
Nixon Scores Political Coup

WHATEVER their foreign consequences, President Nixon's Chinese trump cards should also serve him well in the game of U.S. domestic politics.

Mr. Nixon has now improved his ability to dispose of (1) the renomination of Vice President Agnew; (2) the Presidential primary challenge of Paul Mc-Closkey, the liberal GOP Congressman; (3) the anti-White House revolt of a growing number of conservatives, and (4) the Presidential candidacies of such Democrats as Edmund Muskie, Edward Kennedy and Hubert Humphrey.

Let's start with Spiro T. Agnew, whom many Nixon advisers want replaced in 1972. Agnew doesn't like the President's China policy. This spring, he went out of his way, at the Governors' Conference in Williamsburg, Va., to make a quasi-public attack on what was then just Ping-Pong diplomacy. The President did a slow burn. He asked Southern GOP politicians whether Dixie would accept Agnew's being dumped.

Today, "China diplomacy" is a major weapon in the President's reelection arsenal, and Vice President Agnew was sent out of the country — banished, — almost — during the period of final policy evolution and announcement.

GIVEN THE CENTRALITY of Ping-Pong politics to the President's 1972 plans (and presumably to his post-1972 hopes), Mr. Nixon now has a reason for wanting to replace the Vice President that any working politician, executive or officer must respect: the Vice President's obvious incompatability, as a subordinate, with significant decisions and goals of the President.

The President may or may not want to replace Agnew, but unluckily for the Vice President, the issue on which he has given Mr. Nixon "cause" has turned out to be the policy keystone of 1971-1972.

Rep. Paul McCloskey, who plans to challenge the President in next year's New Hampshire and California primaries, may have to call off his candidacy. With the Peking visit and peace in Southeast Asia in the works, McCloskey's prospects are so hazy that he can expect little financial support and even less party support.

At first blush, President Nixon would seem to be in greater trouble with conservatives than he was before his announcement. Quite a few "foreign policy conservatives" had been hanging fire, believing that however bad White House domestic policies, Mr. Nixon was doing a more appealing job in international affairs. Now many are angry over China.

BUT IF the conservatives use Mr. Nixon's "China diplomacy" as their big issue, they will be making a mistake. The American people like the President's bold gesture, and very few of them will lose much sleep over Taiwan, or over giving Red China some new prestige in order to extricate ourselves from the morass of Vietnam. Even if the President gives China and North Vietnam dangerous concessions to win "peace in our time," public opinion will probably go along.

In the wake of President Nixon's July 15 announcement, many of the capital's liberal Democrats saw their 1972 Presidential hopes slithering down the drain. That is certainly premature, because Akron and Muskogee are concerned about jobs and the economy, rather than the knee-jerk social and foreign policy issues that preoccupy Washington's salon liberals. Still, a springtime 1972 peace coup would be of great assistance to the President, and even the inevitable bustle of high-level foreign affairs and diplomacy will stand him in good stead.

President Nixon should profit simply by comparison with his Democratic opponents. Edmund Muskie was just placed on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee in January in order to give him a fast make-up job in foreign affairs, about which even his admirers admit he knows little. Hubert Humphrey is the apologetic former second-fiddler of Lyndon Johnson's disastrous war policy. And as for Edward Kennedy, suffice it to say that cabarets and discotheques mark the perimeters of his knowledge of foreign policy.

Politically, Mr. Nixon appears to have scored a coup.

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