

THE RECEPTION accorded President Nixon in Egypt was extraordinary, a tribute not just to Egyptian organization and ardor but to Mr. Nixon and his Mideast diplomacy and the good name of the United States. Few Americans can fail to be cheered to see their President so honored in a foreign land, particularly in Egypt, a country whose regard was respected even while Egyptians and Americans were on the outs. The United States has not had so many international triumphs in recent years that it can sniff at one like this. And the new American position in Egypt, which seemed a dedicated Soviet pawn less than a year ago, represents a considerable triumph indeed. Who would have imagined last October that Egypt's President would be visiting the United States next fall?

It is, nonetheless, only a superficial triumph so far. For Mr. Nixon has not so much resolved the Mideast question as taken on a predominant American responsibility to tackle it. The slogan in the streets of Cairo, "We Trust Nixon," was not so much a tribute to the President as a charge to him. President Sadat, abandoning all but a vestigial attachment to "nonalignment," has taken the enormous gamble of, in effect, handing over Egypt's immediate destiny to the United States and putting Egypt's political and economic cares alike in American hands. President Nixon has accepted this responsibility. Evidently he thinks that it is properly an American responsibility and that it provides a way to assert American power. Whether he has also decided to play the Mideast peacemaker in order to bolster his domestic position can only be guessed at. At any rate, the commitment has been made.

The apparent Nixon strategy is to move on the economic front first. In a step obviously meant to outdistance and outshine the prestigious power project built by Moscow, the Aswan Dam, the President agreed to provide nuclear reactors and fuel for generating electricity. The importance of making the "nuclear safeguards" against military application effective and credible is evident. He received from President Sadat a non-expropriation pledge that will be used to attract private American capital. Mr. Nixon also is to use his influence to steer World Bank loans; this will be on a "non-project" basis more satisfactory to Egypt. He reaffirmed his previous request to Congress for \$250 million in direct aid. Such steps should allow Mr. Sadat

to demonstrate—to his people and to other governments—the worth of the American connection. They restore Egyptian political and economic credit-worthiness, a point of special meaning to Egyptian pride ever since John Foster Dulles summarily declared Egypt uncredit-worthy two decades ago. And they should help Cairo attract development money from its largest likely source, Saudi Arabia. What Egyptians call "the reconstruction battle," to which Mr. Sadat has deeply committed himself, can now be waged in earnest.

On the political front, Mr. Nixon and Mr. Sadat apparently agreed to proceed slowly, without a timetable or deadline; to work bilaterally at least for now, rather than in the larger Geneva framework preferred by the Russians; and to focus on Egyptian-Israeli issues first of all. There is a logic in this approach. For Egypt, the largest political rewards will come from regaining territory lost in 1967. For the United States, the largest strategic rewards will come from removing the threat of another Egyptian-Israeli confrontation. But there are also big unknowns. Did Mr. Nixon offer any private assurances on Israeli withdrawal or other political friction points? Will Saudi Arabia, which has special interests in Jerusalem and in the Palestinians, go along? Can Egypt and Israel, both now under American encouragement, keep up the momentum toward settlement? Some part of the answers may emerge as Mr. Nixon continues his Mideast journey, but another part—probably the larger part—will take more time.

To ask such questions is, of course, only to indicate the plain dimensions of the new Mideast mission which Mr. Nixon has accepted for himself and the United States. We think that, diplomatically speaking, he is bold and probably wise to commit the United States to the effort. We point out, however, as we have before, that he has yet to explain adequately to the American public the nature of this new international enterprise, and its inherent risks. Whether Mr. Nixon personally is essential to the success of this venture is, in our view, a quite separate question. Certainly he would like all of us to believe so. His chief of staff, General Haig, made the point almost grossly in Cairo, saying, "Unquestionably, this will help Nixon in the United States." Was General Haig trying to say that is why the President went to the Mideast in the first place? Such a patently self-serving and political claim only diminishes a mission which can stand quite well, we think, on its own.