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Itinerary of Nixon Trip To China Up in the Air

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On the eve of his flight to the People's Republic of China, former President Nixon does not know whom he will meet there, what subjects will be discussed or even where he will board the Chinese airliner sent to pick him up.

The Chinese plane dispatched to transport Nixon's party faced the threat last night that it would be attacked by U.S. citizens with legal claims against the People's Republic of China if it landed in California.

Official sources indicated that because of the threat against Chinese-owned Boeing 707, Nixon and the Chinese were considering four alternatives—landing the plane at Los Angeles International Airport or El Toro Marine Air Station, or having the former President's party meet the plane in Vancouver, B.C., or Tokyo.

As of late last night, no flight plan had been filed by the Chinese flight crew, and official sources guessed that Nixon would meet the plane in Vancouver.

A Justice Department source said, "All puns aside, it's up in the air. We cannot stop private citizens from filing suit against the Chinese. We can only go to court to ask that the Chinese be granted immunity."

Sources close to Nixon said that he has not been told any details of his itinerary in China. There has been vague discussion of a welcoming banquet and possible side trips to Kwelin

and Canton, but Nixon does not know the exact plans the Chinese have for his visit nor does he know how long he will be in China.

The visit is expected to last about a week, the sources said.

Invitations from the People's Republic were extended to Nixon at least four times in the 18 months following his resignation Aug. 9, 1974.

The first came within a month after Nixon's resignation. Sources said later offers included a secret visit to San Clemente by Huang Chen, who heads the Chinese liaison office in Washington, and personal invitations relayed through Julie and David Eisenhower, Nixon's daughter and son-in-law, and through the former Thai ambassador to the United States, Anand Panyarachum.

Informed sources report that former Nixon aide Stephen B. Bull has met with high-ranking Chinese officials about the visit as many as 30 times since last November.

Han Hsu, the second-in-command of the Chinese mission here, handled negotiations. In addition, the Chinese chief of protocol is on the plane coming to pick up Nixon, a source close to Nixon said.

Bull discussed arrangements in Washington because the Chinese didn't want to discuss the matter on phone lines to San Clemente.

Sources report that Nixon instructed Bull that what

ever the Chinese wanted was acceptable to him.

The Chinese apparently offered the former President veto power over which members to American press, if any, would accompany him. Nixon refused to exercise the veto power, sources close to the former President said.

Subsequently, the Chinese asked journalists desiring to make the trip to apply through Peking. The applications granted included only representatives of radio/television networks, wire services and news magazines.

Sources close to Nixon indicate that high-ranking Chinese officials have repeatedly attributed to "elitist media" the responsibility for Nixon's departure from office, with particular emphasis on The Washington Post and The New York Times.

Nixon will stay in the guest house where he stayed on his historic visit to Peking in 1972 and where President Ford stayed on his trip to China last year.

Nixon was always enthusiastic about the trip, accepting China's invitation, sources said, but waited until January to formally accept after his doctor gave approval.

Bull informed the Chinese of Nixon's acceptance a few days after the death of Chinese Premier Chou En-lai.

The Chinese subsequently informed Bull that they would like Nixon to schedule his visit to coincide with the fourth anniversary of his 1972 visit, which ended 23 years of hostility between the United States and the People's Republic of China.

→ See CBS 22 Feb, 7:30 a.m.
NYT 23 Feb, Reuters
NYT 23 Feb, Butterfield