

Nixon to Visit China Soon; Ford Is Reported Irritated

[Two stories; the other is subtitled "Trip, Initiated by Peking, Set for Feb. 21 and termed 'Private.'"]

White House Discounts Visit, Which Will Be at a Delicate Time

NYTimes FEB 7 1976

By PHILIP SHABECOFF
Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, Feb. 6—White House officials said today that President Ford was irritated about former President Richard M. Nixon's impending trip to China, although publicly he was noncommittal.

Ron Nessen, the President's press secretary, said at his regular news briefing this morning that "there is no significance attached to the trip by the White House."

Mr. Nessen said that Mr. Nixon's trip would be "a private visit by a private citizen," and added that "it is not expected to have an impact on the United States-Chinese relations and is not expected to have any domestic consequences."

Delicate Period

However, comments by White House staff officials indicated that the President was annoyed by the news of Mr. Nixon's planned journey to China for several reasons, one of which is that it comes in a delicate political period.

Mr. Nixon and his wife Pat will arrive in Peking on Feb. 21, the fourth anniversary of their historic first visit to China, a visit that reopened direct relations between the two countries after a long period of diplomatic estrangement.

The date also falls three days before the primary elec-

Continued on Page 7, Column 1

Continued From Page 1, Col. 7

tion in New Hampshire, an election important to Mr. Ford's efforts to win the Republican Presidential nomination. One White House aide conceded that the trip would have some impact on the primary by reminding voters that President Ford had pardoned Mr. Nixon for any Watergate offense he might have committed.

The former President's reappearance in the limelight could also serve to remind people that it was he who chose Gerald R. Ford as Vice President after the resignation of Spiro T. Agnew—a choice that led to Mr. Ford's becoming President.

Several experts on China disputed the White House contention that Mr. Nixon's visit had no diplomatic significance. Secretary of State Henry A. Kissinger commented on Capitol Hill today that Mr. Nixon had the distinction of having been the President who reopened United States relations with China and that "his visit as a private citizen will symbolize that relationship."

Other experts viewed the invitation to Mr. Nixon as a reproach to President Ford and Mr. Kissinger. They said that, among other things, the invitation was a reminder that the United States had not yet made good the pledge contained in the Shanghai communiqué, issued at the conclusion of Mr. Nixon's 1972 visit, to move toward a normalization of relations with Peking.

A. Doak Barnett, a senior fellow at the Brookings Institution and a respected expert on Chinese affairs, said of the invitation to Mr. Nixon: "They clearly didn't do this unaware that it is a political act to invite a purged President. In

some convoluted way it is a kind of signal—among many of a low-key sort the Chinese have been sending—that they are uneasy about many of our policies, including détente."

Mr. Barnett added, however, that there was undoubtedly a personal factor in the invitation, springing from a sense of debt to Mr. Nixon for having reopened dealings between the two countries.

Continued Support Seen

The Chinese reportedly have extended invitations to Mr. Nixon several times since he left office in August 1971, most recently through his daughter and son-in-law, Julie and David Eisenhower, who visited China a month ago. The enthusiasm with which the Eisenhowers were received was interpreted by experts as an indication of continued support by the Chinese Government for the policies pursued by Mr. Nixon.

Mr. Nixon's popularity in China is apparently undimmed by the Watergate scandal and his subsequent forced resignation. The Chinese, along with other foreign governments, have indicated bewilderment about the Watergate episode and the reasons for Mr. Nixon's departure from power.

Mr. Nessen said today that President Ford first learned about Mr. Nixon's impending trip after the head of the Chinese liaison office here, Han Hsu, met in the White House with Mr. Ford's adviser on national security, Brent Scowcroft, to inform him of the plans.

Shortly afterward Mr. Ford spoke on the telephone with Mr. Nixon at his estate in San Clemente, Calif., for about 16 minutes. According to Mr. Nessen, the President told Mr. Nixon that he was glad the former President's health permitted

him to make the trip.

President Ford also asked Mr. Nixon to convey his "best wishes" to the Chinese leaders.

The press secretary appeared to be taking pains in his remarks today to dissociate the President and the Administration from Mr. Nixon's trip.

He said that while the State Department would discuss the trip with Chinese authorities, these talks would deal primarily with arrangements for the Chinese plane that will carry Mr. Nixon to Peking.

Mr. Nixon will have no official standing and will be regarded as simply another of the thousands of American citizens who have visited China recently, Mr. Nessen asserted. He added that Mr. Nixon would not be asked to brief President Ford after his return.

Although Mr. Nixon may be traveling as a private citizen, the China trip will be his first real public act since his dramatic departure from the White House on Aug. 9, 1974. He said at the time, and subsequently, that he planned to re-enter public life in some way.

* See SFC [WXP] 7 Feb 76, third paragraph.

Other refs, see copied excerpt, NYT 11 Feb 76, from article by Clifton Daniel.

See NYT 11 Feb 76, copied excerpt of article by Clifton Daniel.

** See transcript, Agronsky and Company, 15 Feb 76 (Lisagor).