

Our New Man in Peking

Thomas S. Gates Jr.

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WASHINGTON, March 19 — In 1965, when most Americans feared that China might intervene in the Vietnam war, Thomas S. Gates Jr., a former defense secretary and then a banking executive, shocked some friends by advocating that the United States begin negotiations with Peking. His advice went nowhere at the time. Today, President Ford named Mr. Gates head of the United States liaison mission to China. With the special rank of ambassador, Mr. Gates will get a chance to see what he can do about involving the Chinese more in the mainstream of world affairs.

The President, with Mr. Gates sitting next to him in the Oval Office, told reporters that he had known Mr. Gates since the two men were officers aboard the aircraft carrier Monterey in the Pacific in 1943.

"I know that he did a superlative job in the Pentagon," the President said. "He has been a good friend ever since, and I am delighted, Tom, that you are undertaking this job."

By personally making the announcement, Mr. Ford dramatized the importance he attached to the relationship with China.

"This is a very, very important post," the President said. "We feel, of course, that our relations with the People's Republic is one of the most important relations that we have with any country throughout the world, and the fact that a former Secretary of Defense is to be assigned to that position I think reflects our conviction."

Mr. Gates's defense background is believed to be valued highly by the Chinese, who have urged the United States to take a firmer stance against the Russians.

Today's announcement brings back to public service a man who was one of the most respected members of the Eisenhower administration, in a succession of Navy and Pentagon jobs to culminating in Secretary of Defense in 1959-60.



His background will help him in Peking.

According to Pentagon experts, Mr. Gates, as Defense Secretary, was responsible for many of the management innovations that his successor, Robert S. McNamara, was credited with.

Mr. Gates, tall, easygoing, with oft-praised informality, was also remembered for having taken steps to accelerate the Navy's nuclear submarine program and for having been able to smooth over the traditional inter-service

vice rivalries at the Pentagon.

This will be his first ambassadorial assignment, and his first visit to China.

But as long ago as 1965, when he was a New York banker, he advocated in a speech to U. S. Steel executives that the United States begin negotiations with China and end the isolation of the Peking regime. The suggestion was not followed until President Richard M. Nixon's opening to China in 1971-72.

Mr. Gates was approached about six weeks ago by Mr. Ford to take the Peking assignment, left vacant by George Bush's reassignment as director of Central Intelligence.

In the mid-1930's Mr. Gates, a Philadelphia Main Liner, came to New York to spend two years with the J.P. Morgan Company, which was closely connected with Drexel. In 1940, he was made a Drexel partner.

He entered the Navy in 1942 and after serving on the Monterey, participated in the invasion of Southern France. In 1945, he was in the Philippine, Iwo Jima and Okinawa campaigns.

He was a captain at war's end, when he returned to banking and other businesses in Philadelphia. In 1953 he was named Under Secretary of the Navy and in 1957 secretary. He became Deputy Defense Secretary later that year.

After the Democratic administration of John F. Kennedy took office, Mr. Gates, a Republican, returned to banking—with the Morgan Guaranty Trust Company, the nation's fifth largest bank. In 1965 he became its chairman and chief executive officer, continuing in that post until 1968. He was a director of the bank until last week when he retired because of his impending 70th birthday.

"Six weeks ago" would be the week of 1-7 Feb 76.