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A Chill in the Washington-Peking Cold War

The chill that started coining President Ford's trip to China long before he left Washington raised the prospect of outright postponement during Secretary of State Henry Kissinger's preparatory visit to Peking last month.

Although he specifically did not recommend postponement or cancellation, Kissinger did advise Mr. Ford that he had that option. In fact, the option was immediately discarded. Such a move would have been read by the Chinese as an obeisance to the Soviets.

Stunned by the lack of warmth that greeted him when he arrived in Peking Oct. 19, Kissinger recommended in a secret cable to the White House that Mr. Ford sharply curtail the original plan for the trip. That plan had projected a week-long stay in China with ceremonial trappings, pulling the Ford trip roughly on a par with the historic 1972 visit of former President Nixon.

But the chill that descended on Kissinger the moment he arrived in Peking in October demanded abrupt change. Kissinger recommended that the Ford visit be radically downgraded by cutting it to four days, eliminating frivolous ceremony and adding a couple of other stops on the Asian tour. The recom-

mendation was carried out.

The chill in the Washington-Peking connection comes at a time when Mr. Ford could not even begin to do what the Chinese Communists want: speed the divorce between the U.S. and Nationalist China. With Ronald Reagan and the

Republican Party's right wing breathing down Mr. Ford's neck, final repudiation of Taipei would be presidential suicide.

Likewise, the President seems totally unable to deal with other major concerns in Peking: the slow unravelling of the U.S.-dominated North Atlantic Treaty Organization; continuing glaring publicly over excesses of American exchange, particularly foreign businessmen; what the Chinese perceive as general unsteadiness in the American government.

All this deeply troubles Peking, where the U.S. connection is given only one value: a brake on Soviet expansionism. Washington's instability, the last thirty years, however, deeply worries Chinese leaders.

That explains the chill over events leading up to Mr. Ford's visit, a climate in which top presidential aides doubt the President will be able to warm up. Thus, only one limited objective is in sight: Convince Peking that the U.S. wants

to continue the new relationship at that level—the top—as with the Soviet Union. Beyond that, no matter how much Mr. Ford talks in Peking, it will take action, not words, to prove to the Chinese that the U.S. can still conduct itself as a great power.

President Ford's political operatives may escalate bitterness in the Ford-Reagan showdown in New Hampshire's presidential primary Feb. 21 by dispatching a "truth squad" of Republican legislators from sunny California to snowy New Hampshire to pick apart Reagan's eight-year record as governor.

Sen. Spencer, the tough Los Angeles political consultant who is now running the Ford national campaign, asked prominent state legislators to head Reagan on the 15-day speaking schedule in New Hampshire. With Reagan devoting a major part of his speeches to claims of fiscal and welfare reforms, the pro-Ford legislators would contend that he actually pushed up spending and taxes while governor.

However, Spencer was turned down by the legislator who would have been the most prestigious truth squad member: state assembly minority leader Robert Deverly, who may run for Congress next

year and is staying neutral in the Ford-Reagan race, at least for the present. Balking at any foreign-voyaging operation, Deverly refused both to serve on the squad or recall members for it.

But another well-regarded state legislator, assemblyman Jerry Lewis, refused to go to New Hampshire with three other legislators to criticise Reagan's record.

The play was used by Spencer in managing Nelson Rockefeller's successful campaign in the 1961 California primary when liberal state legislator Harry Goldwater's steps, dogged to work well then with it seemed to work well then with it. Politicians criticizing an outsider, there is doubt how well sun-tan Californians will go over in windy New England bashing over by gone day.

Moreover, the Ford truth squad will violate the unspoken "11th Amendment"—then shall not speak by another Republican—instituted by California Republican Party in 1963 to suicidal style. Although Reagan will not violate the 11th commandment is inconceivable he would not return against the truth squad.

True

The Price of Sin—America's Report.

PEKING—En Route through Hsawell and Tokyo for President Ford's visit here. In Peking, I asked a wide range of interested parties their view of Sino-American relations. From American admirals to Japanese diplomats in Tokyo, all agreed that there has been a distinct cooling-off.

The Chinese, most believe, are disappointed with American performance in standing up to Moscow. So the issue isn't in President Ford's visit is what price. If any, he should pay to stimulate Sino-American rapport.

The signs of the cooling-off are apparent in little gestures on both sides. The Chinese delayed announcement of the exact time of the Ford visit, and held up dispatch of the American train coming over in advance to make preparations. On the American side, President Ford cut his visit from a week to four days, and added the Philippines and Indonesia to the itinerary—thus converting what had been a China visit to an Asiatrip.

Some American diplomats trace the Chinese pique to internal leadership problems. They claim that Chairman Mao Tse-tung and Premier Chou En-lai were

strong enough to show a pro-American position. Johnson's officials with Washington even had overtly. According to this theory, the transition team under first Vice Premier Teng Hsiao-ping is too vulnerable to attack. Although the U.S. embarked on an embassy relocation, the Taiwan chief to establish a watch on the back from the Chinese felt to be openly conveying condition of "American leadership." associated with Washington. The U.S. Then came the pull-out from Vietnam. Virtually overnight, it was clear that the

Chinese are also genuinely concerned that Washington is not standing up to Moscow as expected. Not only are the Chinese heavily outgunned by the Russians on their northern frontier, but they apparently have a thing about the Soviet Union. They believe the Russians want to mix in Chinese internal affairs. To promote that end the Russians, Peking claims, have embarked upon a policy of encircling China by penetration in the Indian Ocean and Southeast Asia.

Apparently the Chinese had expected the United States to tie up Russia all over the world, from Europe through India to America and Africa to Asia; in short, they perceived, or claim to perceive, an American pretent.

Watergate and the ouster of their great Ford have tended to downplay the Chinese visit.

A minority view, which I share, is that One American diplomat thinks the Chinese made the rare agreement to 'exchange' the United States has going for it in the world.

arena, Peking divides the Communist bloc and eccleasies the Russians. Despite the rhetoric, she acts to strengthen the American presence in South Korea, Japan, the Philippines and Thailand. She restrains North Korea and North Vietnam. She helps from time to time at the United Nations—and the real case against U.N. Ambassador Daniel Moynihan is that, in his preoccupation with rhetoric, he apparently failed to act in timely fashion on a Chinese suggestion which could have postponed an embarrassing issue until next year.

So my feeling is that the United States should pay a price to improve rapport with Peking. The price should not of course be to let American foreign policy be made in Peking. It should center around American determination to resist Russian penetration. It might include a thinning of the relation with Taiwan.

For as the Japanese constantly point out, the cost of alienating China could be very high. It could be, at this time of leadership transition, an easing of tension between Moscow and Peking—which is one of the last things the United States wants.