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Editorial by Senator Mansfield Prepared for Andrew Tully: China and Indochina

Mike Mansfield 1903-2001

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June 29, 1972

CHINA AND INDOCHINA

President Nixon's visit to China last February reopened the doors to official contact with the People's Republic of China. The President was followed to Peking by the joint leadership of the Senate and the leaders of the House of Representatives. Other official visits are to be expected in the future.

In the meantime, communication is being maintained by the U. S. Ambassador and his Chinese counterpart in Paris. If regular contact should falter at some point, the President's foreign policy advisor, Henry Kissinger, or some other emissary can always be dispatched on a resuscitative mission to Peking. In short, the "normalization" of the relationship between the United States and China is well underway. Barring the unforeseen, President Nixon's initiative in February is likely to prove irreversible.

To date, however, the renewed relationship with China has been largely one-sided. Persistent U. S. efforts were required to open the doors in the first place. Continuing U. S. initiatives have since been necessary to keep them open. There is as yet little automatic interplay between Washington and Peking. When it will come is anyone's guess. In my judgment, the timing depends heavily on what transpires in Indochina.

There is still a great deal of reticence in Peking with regard to renewal of official contact with the United States. Much of it is directly related to U. S. military actions in Indochina. Two years ago, the invasion of Cambodia deeply distressed the Chinese. The same reaction resulted from

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the aborted incursion into Laos last year. Now, U. S. air and naval warfare has been reopened on a massive scale against North Viet Nam.

Whatever reasons we may assign to the current military actions, Peking is bound to view them with deep concern. In the first place, the blockade of the North Vietnamese ports shifts an additional burden of support for Hanoi from the Soviet Union to China. In the process, new demands are placed on the limited transport facilities of South China. Most significant, the carrying of the war by air to within a few minutes of the border threatens to compel a more direct Chinese involvement.

The Chinese receptivity to the overtures which brought about the President's visit was based, in part, on the assumption that a U. S. withdrawal from Indochina was a foregone conclusion. There is no reason for them, even now, to believe that in the long run it will be otherwise. However, what has been thrown into doubt by the scale of the military action against North Viet Nam is the speed of the withdrawal. The intensified attacks on the North could signal the end of U. S. engagement on the ground but a prolonged continuance of the involvement by other means. Then, again, it could be the final burst of devastation in a tragedy on which the curtains are closing at last. Until this point is clarified, the Chinese will be watching our actions in Indochina even as they listen to the words of peace from the official visitors to Peking. As seen from the Chinese capital, there can be no genuine rapprochement until the United States military intervention in Indochina--land, sea and air--is brought to an end.