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## 'The U.S. must bow lower,' says Peking

by Gregory F. Buhyoff

Yielding to threats from Peking to downgrade relations with the United States, the Reagan administration announced Jan. 11 that it would refuse requests from the Republic of China on Taiwan to buy advanced fighter jets such as F-16s or F-5Gs, and other advanced equipment. Instead, Taiwan will be allowed only spare parts for already purchased equipment, and continued sales of equipment on existing levels of technology, such as the F-5E fighter jet. The decision was announced at this time, said Washington sources, "in order to send the Soviets a message during the Polish crisis," perhaps because Secretary of State Alexander Haig could not muster up enough support from America's farmers or from Europe to send any other kind of message.

After the world witnessed that, in a China-U.S. contest of wills and principles on the Taiwan arms issue, it was the United States that bowed, Peking immediately denounced Washington for not making the kowtow low enough. "We cannot possibly accept any continued arms sales to Taiwan," declared China's official Xinhua press agency, "and the F-5Es fall into that category." The day after the U.S. announcement, Peking filed an official note of diplomatic protest at the U.S. embassy. Xinhua's complaint that "the U.S. government had announced the decision at a time when bilateral talks are going on," adds additional credence to reports from Washington sources that Haig had led Peking to believe the arms ban to Taiwan would be more severe than what actually occurred.

### A compromise

Washington sources described the Jan. 11 announcement as the result of the following compromise: Haig, a supporter of the China Card at virtually any price, was willing to ban virtually all arms sales to Taiwan. In the anti-Soviet atmosphere surrounding the Polish crisis, Haig was able to convince the President to accept as fundamental U.S. strategy the playing off of China against the U.S.S.R. However, the President, who has repeatedly expressed in public his distrust of the Communist Chinese, reportedly specified two conditions: 1) that the relationship with China not involve irresponsible levels and kinds of arms supply to Peking, e.g.

missile delivery capacity; and 2) that the security and sovereignty of the Republic of China on Taiwan not be endangered. The President accepted evaluations that current levels of military technology to Taiwan would suffice to fulfill the second requirement.

Haig's gambit on a partial arms ban failed to soothe Peking, because, in addition to the Taiwan issue, many powerful factions in Peking oppose Vice-Premier Deng Xiaoping's "America Card" policy. Even Deng himself has begun to distance himself of late from a too-close relationship with Washington. Deng's controlled press now commonly refers to the United States as "hegemonist," as well as the Soviet Union, a charge not heard in years. Premier Zhao Ziyang made a speech in North Korea accusing the United States of "contributing to instability in Northeast Asia."

Some China Card proponents, and even opponents, claim that such rhetoric was merely part of tough bargaining by China, as part of their threat to downgrade relations solely over the Taiwan issue. In fact, something more fundamental is at stake. Domestically, Deng is finding it necessary to revive some of the old Maoist ideology in order to control an increasingly restive population. It is difficult in China to shout leftist slogans at home while getting too close to the United States abroad.

In addition, not only Deng's opponents but the Deng faction itself appears to be doubting the wisdom of making itself a target of the Soviet Union through an alliance with the United States when Washington seems to have failed in the diplomatic battle over Poland. When Assistant Secretary of State John Holdridge flew to Peking Jan. 9 to tell Peking of the arms ban to Taiwan and to seek Chinese support for the U.S. line on Poland, he was informed, Kyodo reports, that Peking is sympathetic to Poland's martial law because, as the overseas Chinese press reports, Peking fears the spread of Solidarity-style strikes in China itself.

The most important effect of the partial Taiwan arms ban may not be on U.S.-China relations at all, but on both U.S. friends' and adversaries' view of Washington. As Mr. Reagan himself used to point out, denial of arms to Taiwan abridges the commitment to an ally that the United States made in the 1979 Taiwan Relations Act. As with Haig's June announcement of willingness to sell arms to China, the arms ban to Taiwan will be seen as yet another instance of U.S. willingness to sacrifice commitments to friends and allies for the sake of its courtship of Peking. Both Japan and the members of the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN) had opposed arms sales to China; ASEAN leaders repeatedly stated that they regard China as a bigger threat than either Vietnam or the U.S.S.R. In light of the decision on Taiwan, how will they now regard current U.S. commitments to them?