

U.S. Sending Signals to Peking

The Ford administration is quietly sending signals to the People's Republic of China that the U.S. intends to upgrade relations with Peking, including indirect military assistance. While seeking to get the message to China, the administration has tried to downplay those signals at home for fear of right-wing charges during the presidential campaign that President Ford is "selling out" Taiwan.

Rumors spreading in Congress that the administration plans to sever ties with Taiwan and recognize the People's Republic after the November election surfaced May 27. The White House made a carefully worded denial the next day to satisfy the critics at home.

Ford has been facing strong pressure within his administration for months to move relations with China off dead center where they have been since the 1972 Shanghai Communiqué. Administration officials are especially concerned to show movement in Sino-U.S. relations during the current political upheaval in China in order to bolster those within the leadership seeking closer ties with the U.S. to

counter the Soviet Union.

While establishing diplomatic ties with Peking at this time is out of the question for domestic political reasons, the "denied" rumor that the U.S. will make the move in November is clearly a positive sign to the Chinese. And the administration has taken other steps to indicate its intentions to Peking. Sec. of Commerce Elliot Richardson said in Tokyo May 28 that the U.S. would be willing to discuss arms sales with China—the first time an administration official has said publicly that military assistance to China was possible. Former Defense Sec. Schlesinger had revealed six weeks earlier that such aid to Peking had been considered informally while he was in the administration.

Richardson's statement was more of a signal than an offer, however, since the administration reportedly does not expect to sell or give weapons to China directly—at least not in the near future—for fear of damaging U.S. relations with the Soviet Union. And Chinese officials told a House Armed Services delegation in Peking last month that China was not

interested in purchasing arms directly from the U.S. But the Chinese have purchased military equipment from U.S. allies, and they reportedly have approached the U.S. for purchase of high-technology quasi-military items not available elsewhere, especially computers.

Apparently wanting to show their continuing interest in military ties with the West, Chinese officials recently gave foreign visitors a tour of a factory where Rolls Royce Spey jet engines were being fitted into Chinese MIG fighters, according to Hong Kong's *South China Morning Post* May 24. China made a \$200 million deal for the engines with the British company last December. The Chinese have also bought helicopters from France and are reportedly negotiating with the Japanese for patrol aircraft and with the West Germans for more helicopters. According to "senior American officials" cited by the *New York Times* April 25, the Ford administration sees these deals made with U.S. approval as a way "to send a positive signal to China without provoking the Soviet Union."

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