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LETTING DOWN OUR FRIENDS

A foreign policy issue, rather than a volatile social issue, has provided the best proof so far that loyalty is simply not a treasured asset in the Reagan Administration. What made this clear was the State Department's decision that it will not permit the sale of advanced military aircraft to Taiwan.

Of all our so-called allies around the world, the Republic of China on Taiwan has been the most reliably loyal. Taiwan has stood by us in war and peace, politically, commercially, and militarily.

All Taiwan wanted in return was to buy advanced fighter planes in order to defend itself from Mainland China's ever-present military threat. But Red China didn't want us to sell those planes to Taiwan and so the State Department denied the request.

The decison was quite a surprise to all those who thought that the election of Ronald Reagan augered better days for U.S.-Taiwan relations. The 1980 Republican Party platform had promised that the Republican Administration would "give priority consideration to Taiwan's defense requirements." The Taiwan Relations Act, which is still in force, says that the United States will maintain the military capacity to resist any use of force against the security of Taiwan.

The Reagan Administration asserted that "no sale of advanced aircraft to Taiwan is required because no military need for such aircraft exists." The fact is that the Chinese Communists are already flying MIG-21s and are now working on their own version of the MIG-23, which is expected to be in production in 1983. Both planes are faster and superior to the F-5E which is the only fighter plane the Reagan Administration will sell to Taiwan (even though we permitted Saudi Arabia to buy 62 of our best fighter plane, the F-15 Eagle).

How can one explain the refusal of the Reagan Administration to sell advanced fighter planes to our reliable ally and ready cash customer? Either the Administration does not want to offend Red China or does not want to offend the Red China lobby in the U.S. media.

The Secretary of Agriculture holds out the hope that Mainland China is "potentially" our biggest market for food exports. It is disingenuous to describe those who cannot pay as potential "customers" or as a "market" for our goods.

Since World War II, per capita income in Taiwan has incresed by almost 3,000 percent. By the year 2000, the per capita income on Taiwan is expected to be triple that of Mainland China. This 3-to-1 ratio is based on the most conservative estimates available.

Red China is compelled to try to make Taiwan disappear from the map because Red China simply cannot stand the competition. Taiwan, with only 14,000 square miles and 18 million people, is one of the world's most fabulous economic successes, while Mainland China with a billion people and nearly four million square miles, is a showcase of economic failure.

Taiwan is one of the best places in the world for overseas American investment. According to International Research and Marketing, Inc., "investments are secure; remittance of profits and convertibility of currency are assured, and the general attitude is receptive to foreign business." Those U.S. banks that made soft, unguaranteed loans to Poland must now be wishing they had chosen Taiwan for their overseas risks.

The political gulf between Mainland China and Taiwan is just as great. The refugees through Hong Kong are still streaming away from Red China and toward Taiwan, not the other way. The death toll from Mao's Cultural Revolution runs into the millions.

Red China's current strongman, Teng Hsiao-p'ing, is an avowed admirer of Stalin. The head of Red China's much talked-about movement toward democracy, Wei Ching-sheng, is now serving a 15-year prison term.

The cultural gap between the two Chinas is as great. Red China's rulers have done everything they can to eliminate traditional Chinese customs and teachings, while the Chinese on Taiwan have gone to great lengths to conserve and enrich those traditions. Our

State Department seems a prisoner of the tired metaphor that we must "play the China card." But for what? One wonders how naive those people must be who take seriously Peking's "peace offer" to Taiwan of last October which said that Taiwan could merge with Mainland China and still retain its own capitalist economy, democratic political system, and armed forces. Anybody who would believe that phony promise would probably believe that the Soviet Union will soon install Lech Walesa as head of Poland.