

China poses a test for Reagan's Asia posture

by Peter Ennis

George Bush, Ronald Reagan's running mate, went to Peking this week, after a stop in Japan, as part of an image-building operation for the Republican ticket.

Instead of the Chinese allowing Bush to use Peking to demonstrate the GOP's readiness to govern and its toughness toward the Soviet Union, their hosts have called them on the carpet. The immediate issue is the continuing Reagan commitment to restoring some form of official ties between the U.S. and the Republic of China on Taiwan, as opposed to the unofficial ties now existing.

This issue is complicated for Reagan; despite efforts to convince Peking that a Reagan administration will not backtrack on the U.S.-China axis, there is also a Reagan call to stand by American commitments and interests around the world. Taiwan is often cited as a prominent example of an abandoned commitment.

From Peking's viewpoint, however, the real issue is ensuring that the "American Card" is there to be played. That requires the elimination of any signs of bucking Peking's will.

Bush on the spot

Bush and Richard Allen, Reagan's Asia policy adviser, arrived in Peking Aug. 21 after talks with Japanese leaders, and are being put through a not-so-subtle Chinese brainwashing program. The day before their arrival, the Republicans were treated to a major editorial in the most important Chinese newspaper, *People's Daily*. The editorial contained the most scathing attack on an American politician since normalization of rela-

tions with the People's Republic of China, accusing Reagan of "brazenly" trying to establish a "two-Chinas" policy. This is a "bankrupt" policy, and "sheer deception" on the part of Reagan, the editorial said. The paper also warned Bush that even though he may hope to focus discussions on strategic matters and trade, he must also "clarify" Reagan's statements on Taiwan.

Thus, even before Bush and Allen arrived, the Chinese put them on the spot, with reporters from all around the world waiting to see how Reagan's representatives would handle this foreign policy challenge. Bush was sent to China to demonstrate Reagan's competence and rationality on foreign policy matters. But the visit threatened to explode into a major incident even before Bush arrived. The Chinese basically told Bush and Reagan, either you agree to our position, or we will make things rough for you, and hurt your image back home.

High-level snub

Many observers were surprised by the ferocity of the Chinese attacks on Bush.

He was not greeted at the airport by any high-level Chinese leaders. Instead, a reporter from the official Hsinhua news service greeted Bush as he stepped off the plane and walked the vice-presidential candidate the whole length of the Peking Airport corridor asking for "clarifications" of Reagan's China policy.

At first, Hsinhua completely blacked out Bush's visit, instead giving very prominent coverage to a statement made Aug. 19 by Assistant Secretary of State



Photo: Philip Ulanovsky/NSIPS

Richard Holbrooke that Reagan's policy toward Taiwan would disrupt Washington's ties with Peking and harm American "national interests throughout Asia."

Not until several hours after Bush arrived did Hsin-hua announce it, reporting only that "American visitor" George Bush, "formerly chief of the American liaison office in Peking before official relations were established," had arrived with his wife. No mention was made of Bush's candidacy for the vice-presidency.

Succumbing to pressure

There is no indication that either Bush or Allen is resisting this pressure. In fact, they appear to be tripping over each other in their efforts to mollify the Chinese leaders.

Both Bush and Allen have tried to downplay the Taiwan controversy, saying it will be easy to clarify the matter. More important, Bush told reporters, is the common interests the United States and China have, especially working against the Soviet Union. "China's influence in foreign affairs continues to grow and the importance of China is recognized by all Americans," he said at an airport press conference. Allen, a former aide to Henry Kissinger, is reported to have talked with Reagan headquarters about the controversy with Peking, but it is not known what was discussed.

Despite the pressure from China on Bush, Peking is making a clear distinction between the vice-presidential candidate and Reagan. One Chinese source told reporters, "We have no problem with Mr. Bush. He's an old friend. The problem is with Reagan."

While Bush and Allen are undoubtedly willing to pay homage to the communist Imperial Court, it appears that more traditional Republican layers around Reagan are not happy about this. Reagan has formed a nine-member Far East Advisory Group chaired by former Central Intelligence Agency deputy director Dr. Ray Cline of Georgetown University. Discussions with several members of this advisory group indicate that Reagan is being told by some to slow down on ties with Peking, and reemphasize American relations with Japan, Korea, the Philippines and Taiwan.

One member of the advisory group voiced particular concern over the decision of the Carter administration to enter a virtual military alliance with Peking, arguing that U.S. interests with China diverge at many crucial points. While not ruling out military ties with China under a Reagan administration, this advisory group member argued that every step must be taken with caution.

A case in point is the upcoming trip to Peking of the Pentagon's top nuclear weapons systems experts, led by Assistant Secretary of Defense William Perry. The ostensible purpose of the trip is to negotiate with China the placing of American monitoring stations there, replacing stations lost in Iran when Khomeini came to power. The advisory group member said Reagan would not necessarily oppose this policy, but would ensure "we got something in return. Cautiousness is the word."

The divisions within Reagan's Far East Advisory Group are also evident in the fact that China specialist Michael Pillsbury is a member. Pillsbury, now a foreign policy analyst with the Senate Republican Steering Committee, was one of the first experts to call for a Chinese-American military alliance, including arms sales to Peking. He is believed to have helped formulate the Carter administration policy that Reagan is, at least nominally, opposed to.

Reagan himself reflected this dichotomy on the China issue in a speech before the Veterans of Foreign Wars convention on Aug. 18, just two days after Reagan had promised to restore "official" relations with Taiwan. He gave a rip-roaring speech in defense of the Vietnam War that many interpreted as a signal to Peking. Calling the war a "just cause," Reagan made it clear that he still views Vietnam as an enemy of the United States, effectively encouraging on-going Chinese and Thai hostilities against Moscow-allied Vietnam.

Should China undertake actions against Vietnam again, as it did a year ago, the Soviet Union is likely to become involved. At such a point, if Reagan is President, he will have to quickly decide whether alliance with Peking and defense of Chinese imperialist actions are worth the risk of a U.S.-Soviet confrontation.