

1961 CINCPAC China Assessment

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During 1961, China began adding missiles to their forces for the first time. A launch complex, consisting of probably surface-to-surface missiles launch test sites and a surface-to-air missiles site, was reported at Tien Tsung Ta Wan. Moreover, three surface-to-air missile sites were reported at Peiping. Other force developments included the loss of eight ground force divisions, and the addition of another Soviet Whiskey-class submarine to the Navy.

On the U.S. side, the most important military development was the inclusion of the SIOP (Single Integrated Operational Plan), a new central plan for strategic nuclear warfare. While focused on the Soviet Union, the SIOP also incorporated nuclear strikes against China, and was incorporated into CINCPAC's general war plan 1-61.

Some forces with SIOP commitments became involved in the most visual U.S. engagement in 1961; the Laos crisis. Twice during the first half of the year, U.S. forces were placed on heightened alert. A DEFCON 2 (the second highest defense condition; one step below actual war) was declared in January and again in March. The four aircraft carriers USS Bennington, USS Kearsarge, USS Lexington, and USS Midway were rotated to positions in the South China Sea, while maintaining their ability to support contingency and SIOP operations.

A second U.S. plan concerned the defense of Hong Kong against a Chinese attack. OPLAN (Operational Plan) 23-61 provided for U.S. military operations in support of British forces during a forced withdrawal from the colony. The plan incorporated the use of nuclear weapons and planning guidance was detailed in Annex E which was promulgated on December 27, 1961.

A third plan involved the defense of South Korea against a Chinese-supported attack from the north. This plan, called OPLAN 27-60, also involved nuclear operations which were described in the plan's Annex E that was promulgated on August 31, 1961.

These plans and operations are described in more detail in the selected pages from the 1961 CINCPAC history provided below:

Commander in Chief, U.S. Pacific Command, "CINCPAC Command History 1961," April 27, 1962. Only selected pages. Partially declassified and released under FOIA. (1.29 MB)

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