1966 CINCPAC China Assessment

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China conducted three more nuclear explosions in 1966, including its first two attempts to develop thermonuclear weapons. The third (the second explosion of the three) involved a nuclear warhead delivered by a Dong Feng-2 missile, China's first nuclear-capable surface-to-surface missile.

The full-scale nuclear test launch of the DF-2 missile continued development of the medium-range ballistic missile that China had been working on for years, but CINCPAC intelligence also reported that a "high priority program to develop a new missile system, probably an intercontinental ballistic missile system," was evident.

Ground forces showed some development in weapon systems and the Air Force acquired more MIG-19 aircraft. Of the 22 surface-to-air missile sites identified by late-1965, only one was located in the south.

As a result of these and other developments, China appeared in the CINCPAC assessment as a more autonomous threat alongside the Soviet Union. In its annual Joint Strategic Capabilities Plan (JSCP), which formed the basis for CINCPAC's planning, the JCS specified Chinese objectives in the region, "and the fact that the Chinese communists were making a major nuclear effort was emphasized." This new focus was also reflected in the JCS Joint Long-Range Strategic Study for 1977-1986, which pointed to uncertainties in the U.S.-Soviet and Soviet-China relationships in a possible confrontation between the U.S. and China. As a result, the JCS called for a more "China-oriented strategic nuclear deterrent and ICBM defense that would pose no threat to the USSR."

During 1966, the JCS also published the Joint Strategic Objectives Plan (JSOP) for the 1969-1976 period, which reflected the "growing Chinese communist threat" and assessed the emerging Soviet-China rift. In January, JCS directed his Specials Studies Group to evaluate the military feasibility of limited-objective offensives against the China Mainland as a alternative to countering a Chinese invasion of Southeast Asia. CINCPAC, in turn, ordered his own study which considered air strikes against "value" targets in China. Although the study concluded that a Chinese invasion in Southeast Asia could be repelled by non-nuclear means, nuclear options were also examined.

These plans and operations are described in more detail in the selected pages from the 1966 CINCPAC history provided below:

Commander in Chief, U.S. Pacific Command, "CINCPAC Command History 1966," June 13, 1967. Only selected pages. Partially declassified and released under FOIA. (0.81 MB)

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