1967 CINCPAC China Assessment

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The principle change in the threat from China was in its growing nuclear weapons and guided missile capabilities, CINCPAC said. Two more nuclear tests and several missile test firings were conducted during the year, "bringing Communist China very near to, if not achievement of, initial operational capability in both weapons.

A ballistic missile submarine program might also be underway, and a plutonium production facility was reported to possibly have begun operation, which would greatly enhance China's nuclear weapons production capability. Production of MIG-19s continued to replace older MIG-15/17 aircraft, enhancing China's air defense posture. Approximately 24 SA-2 surface-to-air missile sites were operational.

CINCPAC stated that while China may conduct limited operations against neighboring areas, Chinese leaders were unlikely to initiate any action which they estimated could result in a major confrontation with the United States. Although China's antagonism to the U.S. was not likely to change in the short run, CINCPAC concluded that "China's vulnerabilities to nuclear attack would make it infeasible for the Chinese to initiate a major war with a major power."

At the same time, the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) issued the Joint Strategic Objectives Plan (JSOP), which directed that U.S. forces, "particularly the nuclear force, targeted against deterrence of Communist China, and particularly China's nuclear capability, should be distinguishable from that against the USSR." The U.S. should have "maximum flexible" nuclear and non-nuclear capabilities in response to the overall threat. The JSOP also stated that the U.S. strategy against China, which had been largely directed toward the "peripheral manifestations" of the threat, should now be focussed increasingly on China itself.

CINCPAC's nuclear command and control procedures were tested in the JCS sponsored worldwide command post exercise High Heals VI in October and November 1967. Although participation of Pacific units was limited due to the responsibilities in the Vietnam war, the exercise scenario simulated a crisis where the U.S. was confronted by the Soviet Union and China, and where China had deployed extensive forces, some to coastal regions opposite Taiwan and along the Yalu River.

The JCS also completed a Long-Range Strategic Study which attempted to predict the situation in the 1978-1987 time frame. This study portrayed China as an "increasing if sometimes exaggerated

threat" with a growing nuclear capability, and defined that a strategy for containing Chinese expansion in the East and South Asia required three interrelated parts:

- deterring or defeating direct or indirect aggression;
- strengthening the areas threatened by aggression or subversion; and
- influencing the Chinese and other Asian communist leaders to seek a more constructive relationship with the outside world.

The JCS study predicted that any actual military conflict was more likely to be in the form of an insurgency rather than strategic nuclear war. To contain Soviet and Chinese ambitions, however, it would be necessary for the U.S. to demonstrate its willingness to commit decisive military strength. A major U.S. military role was anticipated because of the increasing Chinese threat and the lack of cohesiveness of non-communist Asian nations. Overall, even though it lacked the strategic capabilities of the Soviet Union, the study concluded that China nonetheless posed a "more imminent threat" because of its aggressive policies and growing military strength.

These plans and operations are described in more detail in the selected pages from the 1967 CINCPAC history provided below:

Commander in Chief, U.S. Pacific Command, "CINCPAC Command History 1967," March 28, 1968, Volume 1. Only selected pages. Partially declassified and released under FOIA. (0.95 MB)

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