

1970 CINCPAC China Assessment

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China conducted a single nuclear explosion in 1970 and no missile tests were highlighted. Although CINCPAC had predicted an operational nuclear capability in 1967 and 1969, the 1970s assessment was that "China was expected to have a credible nuclear capability in the next few years."

The ballistic missile submarine program remained at a single possible diesel-powered submarine, and SA-2 surface-to-air missiles sites increased from 39 to 57.

These modest developments had much less impact on PACOM, however, that reductions in the defense budget and the draining war in Vietnam. As a result, the Joint Strategic Capabilities Plan (JSCP) issued by the JCS deleted many CINCPAC tasks while adding others. For example, CINCPAC was no longer required to plan for so-called Cold War operations (an increasingly outdated concept from the early 1960s). Moreover, requirements were deleted for CINCPAC to plan for operations to counter a major communist aggression in Southeast or Northeast Asia concurrently with lesser Chinese aggression elsewhere in Pacific Command.

Behind some of these developments was the Nixon administration's pursuit of a new China policy, which sought to engage the communist nation. Yet the reductions could result in increased communist initiatives as they sensed a developing power vacuum, CINCPAC warned. Miscalculations could dramatically heighten East-West tensions and the likelihood of nuclear warfare. Indeed, the serious reductions in general purpose non-nuclear forces to contingencies in the region, CINCPAC highlighted, could force an inflexible choice between withdrawal or resorting to nuclear options.

President Nixon assured of a continued U.S. nuclear commitment by pledging that, the U.S. "would provide a nuclear shield if an ally or a nation we considered vital to our security was threatened by a nuclear power."

These plans and operations are described in more detail in the selected pages from the 1970 CINCPAC history provided below:

Commander in Chief, U.S. Pacific Command, "CINCPAC Command History 1970," n.d. [1971], Volume 1. Only selected pages. Partially declassified and released under FOIA. (0.74 MB)

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