

# 1973 CINCPAC China Assessment

---

## Recommended Citation

"1973 CINCPAC China Assessment", Nuclear Strategy, January 31, 2000,  
<https://nautilus.org/projects/nuclear-strategy/1973-cinpac-china-assessment/>

---

CINCPAC estimated that China would be "the second strongest potential enemy in PACOM," but that its conventional threat would be substantially limited to the PACOM area.

The "détente" with China continued with attempts to normalize relations following President Nixon's historic visit the previous year. Yet as Secretary of Defense Elliot Richardson reminded the Congress, "regardless of what we hope the ultimate intentions of the Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China may be, we must keep before us a clear-eyed calculation of their present and future military capabilities."

China did "not yet" pose a strategic nuclear threat to the United States (the Soviet Union was considered "the only" such threat by 1973), but China "had given high priority to the creation of a theater nuclear capability." These regional nuclear forces were capable of attacking some Soviet targets, as well as U.S. and allied forces in a wide area from Japan through Korea and Taiwan to the Philippines and Southeast Asia. It was estimated that China by 1974 may be capable of deploying a missile that could reach all of Russia and part of Alaska. Overall, however, the Chinese military capability was expected to be regionally oriented until late in the decade.

China conducted one nuclear explosion in 1973, a large-yield bomb of two to three megaton dropped from an H-6 bomber.

China's strategic attention was focused on the northern border where clashes with Soviet forces continued. During 1973, Soviet harassment of Chinese boats on the Amur and Ussuri rivers increased. China continued to prepare for the remote possibility of a Soviet attack, even a first strike against China's limited nuclear forces. As a result, China's strategic posture had been reoriented from the south and east to the north and northeast.

China's focus on the Soviet Union in turn had reduced the potential Chinese threat to Taiwan, and preparations for the withdrawal of U.S. forces from Taiwan continued, with forces being relocated to Japan and Taiwan. In any case, CINCPAC was confident that the U.S., "with or without the forces of [Taiwan], could defeat an attempt by [China] to take Taiwan."

The CINCPAC FOIA office mistakenly deleted all tables relating to the status of Chinese forces from the 1973 history. The pages have been re-requested and will be made available when released. Other

relevant pages are provided below:

Commander in Chief, U.S. Pacific Command, "CINCPAC Command History 1973," August 30, 1974, Volume 1. Only selected pages. Partially declassified and released under FOIA. (1.24 MB)

---

Funding for this project was provided by the [The John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation](#) and [Ploughshares Fund](#). For information about the Nuclear Strategy Project contact [Hans M. Kristensen](#).

---

View this online at: <https://nautilus.org/projects/nuclear-strategy/1973-cinpac-china-assessment/>

Nautilus Institute

2342 Shattuck Ave. #300, Berkeley, CA 94704 | Phone: (510) 423-0372 | Email:

[nautilus@nautilus.org](mailto:nautilus@nautilus.org)