

1975 CINCPAC China Assessment

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President Ford visited China in December and news agencies carried several high-profile reports on how China had slowly built up a sizeable naval force. CINCPAC's intelligence assessment described how China was moving toward "a more extensive role" for the Navy. This assessment was supported by the launching of China's first nuclear powered attack submarine. Overall, however, the modernization was modest.

The pace of strategic forces development was not impressive and CINCPAC's assessment quoted a United Press International report saying that China "had encountered difficulty in developing a Polaris-type nuclear submarine or a long-range missile capable of hitting the United States." Moreover, the Associated Press carried a denial by military intelligence sources, saying that China had not yet deployed long-range missiles capable of hitting Moscow. The or four silos for such missiles had been built in Western China but were still empty.

CINCPAC estimated that China had 64 surface-to-surface missile sites with 93 launchers, compared with 51 sites and 87 launchers the previous year. Only three of these sites were ICBMs, however, with the majority being 38 IRBM on 30 launchers.

The U.S. withdrawal from Taiwan continued, but the situation was complicated by the violation of Chinese air space during the Blue Sky exercise in January. A formal protest was logged by China and a 50 nautical mile buffer zone was established along China's coast. Moreover, following the death of Taiwan's President Chiang Kai-shek in April 1975, the Taiwanese government changed its policy by authorizing it naval forces inspect and chase off Chinese fishing boats that strayed across the center-line of the Taiwan Strait. The U.S. in turn reviewed its own internal guidelines to insure that U.S. forces did not become involved.

The reduction of U.S. forces in the region triggered concern over whether Taiwan might decide to develop nuclear weapons and what the role of U.S. nuclear weapons in South Korea would be if North Korea took advantage of the situation. Taiwan's new president, Chiang Ching-kuo, disclosed that Taiwan had started nuclear weapons research in 1958 and considered in 1974 to build up a nuclear arsenal. When presented with this plan, however, the late president Chiang Kai-shek "rejected it immediately on the grounds that we cannot use nuclear weapons to hurt our own countrymen."

When asked about the U.S. response to a possible North Korean attack against the south, U.S. Defense Secretary Schlesinger confirmed that nuclear weapons were deployed in South Korea:

"As I have indicated earlier, we cannot foreclose any option. We have deployed in Korea the tactical nuclear weapons as is, I believe, well known. [...] If circumstances were to require the use of tactical nuclear weapons, of course, I think that that would be carefully considered, but the ground forces balance in the Korean Peninsula is not unsatisfactory... [...] the major effort that I have made since I have been here has been to provide us with a conventional capability which is the only way to keep the nuclear threshold high."

Yet CINCPAC noted that the Pacific Doctrine enunciated in connection with President Ford's visit to China in December 1975, unlike the pledge of the Nixon Doctrine from 1969 to provide a nuclear umbrella to protect allied nations, made no mention of either nuclear threats or the Nixon Doctrine.

In either case, the value of nuclear weapons in South Korea seemed dubious given that CINCPAC Intelligence concluded that North Korea would not be able to sustain an attack for more than 90 days without substantial assistance from either China or the Soviet Union. Moreover, "Available evidence indicated that [China] and Russia would not support an attack by North Korea." Finally, the South Korean president told the New York Times that, "in five years South Korea will no longer need American ground, air, or naval forces, or even logistic support, to help defend itself if North Korea attacks without Chinese or Soviet aid."

Selected pages from the 1975 CINCPAC history are provided below:

Commander in Chief, U.S. Pacific Command, "CINCPAC Command History 1975," October 7, 1976, Volume 1. Only selected pages. Partially declassified and released under FOIA. (0.92 MB)

Commander in Chief, U.S. Pacific Command, "CINCPAC Command History 1975," October 7, 1976, Volume 2. Only selected pages. Partially declassified and released under FOIA. (1.38 MB)

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