

1976 CINCPAC China Assessment

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China's strategic forces "continued to develop slowly." The DF-4/CSS-3 surface-to-surface missile had been tested in its ballistic missile role three times: 1970, 1971, and in May 1976. It had also been used to place two small satellites in orbit (1970 and 1971). Two operational silos had been identified, but CINCPAC considered it probable that only limited numbers would be deployed in silos. CINCPAC credited the DF-4 with a range of 3,200-3,500 nautical miles (5,926-6,482 km), which is considerably more than the 2,560-2,900 nautical miles (4,750-5,500 km) normally attributed to this weapon by unofficial sources.

A new ballistic missile with a much longer range, the DF-5/CSS-4, had initially experienced "developmental problems," but its use in launching three satellites in 1975 and one in 1976 indicated that the problems had been resolved. Construction of DF-5 silos had not yet begun but CINCPAC estimated that the system could be operational in the 1978-1980 time period. China would eventually obtain its objective of a secure second strike nuclear capability, CINCPAC predicted.

Overall, a total of 65 surface-to-surface missile sites with 98 launchers were listed. This included two ICBM sites with two launchers (down from three in 1975), 31 IRBM sites (up one from 1975) with 32 launchers, and 15 MRBM (up one from 1975) sites with 21 launchers.

The [number of nuclear test explosions](#) increased from one test each of the previous two years to four tests in 1976. The fourth test conducted on November 17, involved an H-6 bomber dropping a thermonuclear bomb that exploded with approximately four megaton yield, the largest Chinese test to date.

The drawdown of forces on Taiwan continued. The Boston Globe reported that President Ford during his visit to China in December 1975 had pledged to reduce the U.S. military presence on the island by half within a year. During 1976, CINCPAC coordinated with the Joint Chiefs of Staff to implement the reductions. The Chinese Air Force carried out its first "deep penetration" of the Taiwan Strait airspace since 1968 and defensive patrols between the coast and off-shore islands became commonplace. Sixteen confirmed Chinese naval transits of the strait took place during the year, up from three in 1974 and five in 1975. Despite these events, and although there were signs of impatience in Peking over the Taiwan issue, CINCPAC concluded that "there was no indication that China would attempt to use force to 'liberate' the island."

This assessment echoed the conclusion of a December 1975 study referenced by the Deputy Secretary of Defense in a [memorandum](#) to the Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs. The study concluded that China would be unable to mount a successful non-nuclear invasion of Taiwan much before 1980. In light of this conclusion, the memorandum, which was obtained under FOIA by the [National Security Archive](#), explained the U.S. arms sales policy to Taiwan by saying that the "intent was not to maintain a quantitative balance, but to maintain a qualitative balance similar to the present [China-Taiwan] force relationship." The memorandum cautioned that any significant limitations on Taiwan's defensive capabilities inevitably put a greater rapid response burden on U.S. forces, and provided 4 revised options for arms sales to Taiwan.

On Korea, however, the U.S. and China seemed almost to have achieved an interdependence: CINCPAC concluded that China was no longer opposed to U.S. military presence in the region but instead saw it as a counter to North Korean "adventurism" on the peninsula. From the U.S. perspective, CINCPAC added, China "served as a restraining force on North Korea."

Selected pages from the 1976 CINCPAC history are provided below:

Commander in Chief, U.S. Pacific Command, "CINCPAC Command History 1976," October 18, 1977, Volume 1. Only selected pages. Partially declassified and released under FOIA. (1.29 MB)

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