

1979 CINCPAC China Assessment

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China attacked Vietnam on February 17, 1979, but quickly announced on March 5 that it would withdraw and completed the withdrawal on March 16. The aggression and the abrupt pull-back reflected serious conflicts with the Chinese leadership. Chinese Vice Prime Minister Deng Xiaoping had previously spoken of Vietnamese "small hegemonism" as merely "making trouble," but after a visit to Washington and Japan in February 1979, Deng described Vietnam as a "the Cuba of the East" providing a base for Soviet influence in the region.

In response to the invasion, the Soviet Union sent long-range bombers into the South China Sea and dispatched several warships southward. The Chinese aggression provided a justification for the Soviet Union to establish a base at Cam Ranh Bay and other locations in Vietnam, a development that was neither in the interest of China, the U.S., nor Japan. CINCPAC intelligence further warned against the risk of a "Gulf of Tonkin" incident involving Chinese and Soviet naval forces which could escalate into a larger conflict between the two nuclear powers.

Along these events, Chinese nuclear modernizations continued in 1979. Only a single nuclear test explosion occurred, but the deployment of DF-4/CSS-3 finally seemed to get underway with 10 ICBM sites/launchers reported, an increase by eight from two in 1978. Other surface-to-surface missiles included 61 IRBM/MRBM/SRBM sites with 58-76, 41-57, and 5-9 launchers, respectively, a slight reduction from the previous year.

The situation on the Korean peninsula significantly deteriorated in 1979. In July, President Carter announced that the decision from 1978 to withdraw ground combat forces was put on hold following the detection of North Korean tunnels under the Demilitarized Zone, the extent of surface infiltration into South Korea by North Korean agents, and revised intelligence estimates on the strength of North Korean forces. Further reductions would be suspended until at least 1981.

Then on October 26, South Korean President Park Chung-hee was assassinated by gunmen. The serious event was followed in December by a major reorganization of power within the South Korean Army, during which the Army Chief of Staff (who was also Martial Law Commander) was arrested along with four other generals. According to CINCPAC, this move was taken "without constitutional authority and several battalions were moved in violation of the charter of the Combined Forces Command." The incident raised "serious concern about the stability within the military" and possible attempt by North Korea to take advantage of the situation. The assessment by the U.S. Embassy in

Beijing, however, was that China was unlikely to support South Korea in an offensive.

Although no troop movements were detected among North Korean troops, U.S. forces in Korea were placed in Defense Condition (DEFCON) Three on October 26, in which the possibility of U.S. force involvement existed. Both air and naval forces were dispatched to Korea as a warning to North Korea. This included a naval task force headed by the aircraft carrier USS Kitty Hawk (CV-63), which took position in the East China Sea. The ship's Deployment Report indicates that the USS Kitty Hawk was nuclear armed at the time.

Selected pages from the 1979 CINCPAC history are provided below:

Commander in Chief, U.S. Pacific Command, "CINCPAC Command History 1979," November 14, 1980, Volume 1. Only selected pages. Partially declassified and released under FOIA. (1.33 MB)

Alongside these developments, the withdrawal of U.S. forces from Taiwan continued as planned. The pull-out, which is described in a detailed appendix to the main history, was completed as part of an agreement between Washington and Peking to normalize diplomatic relations between China and the United States. Due to the size of the appendix (127 pages), the document is divided into five sections provided below in chronological order:

Commander in Chief, U.S. Pacific Command, "CINCPAC Command History 1979," November 14, 1980, Appendix I: Taiwan Wrap-Up, [pages 1-18](#). Partially declassified and released under FOIA. (1.01 MB)

Commander in Chief, U.S. Pacific Command, "CINCPAC Command History 1979," November 14, 1980, Appendix I: Taiwan Wrap-Up, [pages 19-49](#). Partially declassified and released under FOIA. (1.54 MB)

Commander in Chief, U.S. Pacific Command, "CINCPAC Command History 1979," November 14, 1980, Appendix I: Taiwan Wrap-Up, [pages 51-79](#). Partially declassified and released under FOIA. (0.93 MB)

Commander in Chief, U.S. Pacific Command, "CINCPAC Command History 1979," November 14, 1980, Appendix I: Taiwan Wrap-Up, [pages 81-107](#). Partially declassified and released under FOIA. (1.08 MB)

Commander in Chief, U.S. Pacific Command, "CINCPAC Command History 1979," November 14, 1980, Appendix I: Taiwan Wrap-Up, [pages 109-127](#). Partially declassified and released under FOIA. (0.89 MB)

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