

1981 CINCPAC China Assessment

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One of the most important new developments was the launching of China's first nuclear-powered ballistic missiles submarine. Designated the "Xia" class by the West, the new submarine had been under development for about 20 years and was equipped with 12 launch tubes for ballistic missiles (the designated JULANG-1 missile did not become operational until a few years after the launch of the submarine).

CINCPAC also reported the launch of China's second nuclear-powered attack submarine, bringing the total inventory of these boats to two.

China did not conduct any nuclear test explosions in 1981, however, the first year since 1964 that no full-scale nuclear warhead experiment had been carried out.

Ballistic missile development progressed at its normal pace with CINCPAC increasing its assessment of the number of ICBM sites to 10, returning to its 1979 estimate after a scale-back in 1980. Only four of these were silos with another six being roll-out launchers, presumably for the DF-4/CSS-3 system. Three new sites were reported for medium-range surface-to-surface missiles (IRBM/MRBM) for a total of 64. This included 60-101 IRBM launchers and 41-50 MRBM launchers.

CINCPAC stated that the U.S. had several parallel interests with China, particularly a shared concern over Soviet expansionist activities. Chinese forces deployed along the northern border continued to tie down a quarter of the Soviet Union's ground and air forces.

Along with its new relationship with the U.S., CINCPAC described how China was attempting new ways of strengthening its status in the region. After the invasion of Vietnam in 1979, for example, China had changed its policy toward the Southeast Asian nations by emphasizing state-to-state relations with ASEAN members, "at the cost of curtailing aid to communist movements in the region." CINCPAC anticipated that China wanted a strong ASEAN to counter Vietnamese "hegemony" in Southeast Asia. China had also strengthened its relations with Thailand by promising assistance in case of an attack by Vietnam, and was trying to "woo" other nations including Singapore and Indonesia.

CINCPAC's assessment of the situation on the Korean peninsula evolved dramatically. While only a few years earlier having supported dramatic reductions in U.S. force levels, and the South Korean President saying that U.S. forces would soon no longer be needed to counter the North Korean threat,

CINCPAC intelligence in 1981 assessed that North Korea enjoyed an advantage over South Korea "in almost every combat strength and equipment." The overall conclusion was that, "on balance, North Korea's military forces were stronger than those of the ROK." Regardless of this assessment, however, CINCPAC estimated that North Korea was deterred from attacking, partly because of the Chinese desire to retain status quo on the peninsula.

Selected pages from the 1981 CINCPAC history are provided below:

Commander in Chief, U.S. Pacific Command, "CINCPAC Command History 1981," September 30, 1982, Volume 1. Only selected pages. Partially declassified and released under FOIA. (1.28 MB)

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Nautilus Institute

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