

1983 CINCPAC China Assessment

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China conducted two underground nuclear test explosions during the year, and four new ICBM sites were reported, bringing the total to 14. The number of ICBM launchers, however, remained at 9-20. The number of shorter-range ballistic missile (IRBM/MRBM) launch sites and launchers remained unchanged compared with 1982.

On the Korean situation, CINCPAC continued to stress North Korea's military build-up and modernization of forces. He specifically pointed to China's delivery of 40 MIG-21 fighters to North Korea in the spring of 1982 as a demonstration of "Beijing's continued willingness to fill the void created when Soviet deliveries of high performance aircraft ceased in the early 1970s." The weakening Soviet ties were continued due to North Korea's independent and unpredictable behaviour and Moscow's desire for stability in Northeast Asia. Despite this, CINCPAC concluded that any prospects for any near-term full-scale military invasion by the north would stay low as long as the south stayed politically stable and militarily strong.

A test of China's role on the Peninsula came in connection with North Korea's strong reaction to a scheduled U.S.-South Korea Team Spirit exercise on the peninsula. Although no military movements were observed in the north, Pyongyang's public announcement of a "quasi" war alert prompted the U.S. State Department to request that the embassy in Beijing try to get China to inform the North Koreans that the exercise was routine and not a preparation for war. Both U.S. Embassies in Beijing and Seoul, however, believed that since China had consistently declined to deliver messages to North Korea in the past, they would not do so in this case and the initiative was dropped.

For the U.S. post-Vietnam war credibility in the region as such, CINCPAC declared that the previous estimate of how long it would take recover was wrong. The previously prediction had been that it would take two decades, but in the 1983 command history CINCPAC declared that the U.S. "currently enjoy more cohesion and coincidence of view with our Asian friends and allies than we have in many years." In terms of China's intentions, CINCPAC assessed, "China will likely develop closer relations with the United States and continue to value America's military presence in the Pacific as a deterrent to the aggressive tendencies of the USSR." A Chinese invasion of Taiwan was not considered likely.

Selected pages from the 1983 CINCPAC history are provided below:

Commander in Chief, U.S. Pacific Command, "CINCPAC Command History 1983," September 27, 1984, Volume 1. Only

selected pages. Partially declassified and released under FOIA. (1.10 MB)

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