



1984 CINCPAC China Assessment

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China's positive status in support of U.S. foreign policy objectives was further enhanced in 1984. CINCPAC stated that he "appreciated the very important regional and global role" played by China in deterring Vietnamese aggression and countering Soviet power in the Pacific. About half of Vietnam's forces were tied down along the Chinese border and approximately 90 percent of Soviet ground forces in the Far East were "locked" in the Sino-Soviet confrontation. CINCPAC believed U.S.-Chinese relations had brought positive results for the United States and could serve as an important force for stability throughout the world.

China had approximately half of its ground forces deployed near the Soviet border and considered itself surrounded by Soviet interests in Vietnam and Afghanistan. As a result, CINCPAC explained, Chinese strategy against the Soviet Union had evolved from one of "luring deep" and attaining victory through Mao's "people's war" to a strategy of fighting forward in selective areas and generally not giving up territory. Key to the new Chinese strategy, CINCPAC said, was Beijing's assessment that it would fight and win a protracted war with the Soviet Union, both in a conventional and nuclear environment.

Despite its rift with the Soviet Union and newfound relations with the United States, China increasingly stressed the theme of independence from alignment with either superpower. Yet it continued to view the Soviet Union as the major foreign threat to its security. As for the United States, CINCPAC said relations reached a new threshold of cooperation after U.S. Defense Secretary Caspar Weinberger's visit to China in 1983 and Chinese Defense Minister Zhang Aiping's reciprocal visit to the United States in 1984.

[National Security Decision Directive \(NSDD\) 140](#) from April 1984, which was obtained under FOIA by the [National Security Archive](#), further outlined the defense objectives in preparation for President Reagan's visit to China. In seeking to "promote a China that remains independent of the Soviet orbit," NSDD-140 sought to raise the level of strategic dialogue and expand cooperation against "the common threat posed by the USSR," and discuss how to stabilize the situation on the Korean peninsula. The directive underlined the need to upgrade certain defensive Chinese military capabilities and continue to expand military-to-military visits.

These events were following by the conclusion of the first significant military equipment contract in July 1984. According to CINCPAC Intelligence, the Chinese were looking to the U.S. for further assistance in modernizing its forces, including:

- Anti-tank systems;

- Air defense systems;
- Avionics for fighter aircraft; and
- Artillery ammunition production techniques.

Indeed, by 1984 the military-to-military relations with China had become so solid that the CINCPAC history included China in its section among countries that receive ongoing military assistance. The stated U.S. objectives of this assistance (see item two below for more details) were:

- Provide support for China's efforts to strengthen its military capabilities to defend against external threats and counter Soviet expansionist policies, thereby contributing to regional defense and stability;
- Promote the evolution and modernization of China's armed forces while encouraging qualitative improvements in the PRC's defense efforts;
- Give appropriate consideration to Chinese requests for FMS [foreign military sales] or commercial sales of military equipment, training, and services; and in general, maintain an attitude of helpfulness and cooperation with the Chinese armed forces which will enhance China's preference for U.S.-made equipment and technology;
- Through the sale of defense equipment, services, and technology, give the People's Liberation Army a vested interest in the development of an enduring relationship with the United States.

The foreign military sales agreement was granted by President Reagan during a 3-day visit to Washington by China's Defense Minister Zhang Aiping, who also signed an Agreed Minute with Defense Secretary Caspar Weinberger. The document, the existence and substance of which were to be kept secret, contained the following language:

Agreed Minutes

During the December 1983 visit by Defense Secretary Weinberger to the PRC at the invitation of PRC Minister of National Defense Zhang Aiping, the two sides held serious and sincere discussions and agreed on the principle of Sino-American military technology cooperation at agreed levels of technology including mutually agreed military equipment and weapon systems that are already fielded, in production, and in some cases, in research and development stages.

Subsequently, the two sides established staff-level work teams for Sino-American military technology cooperation, to continue the discussions and develop mutually agreed upon military mission areas and levels of technology for cooperation. As a result of meetings between the work teams, the two sides have agreed on some cooperation projects, particularly production of anti-tank missile systems and modernization of large-caliber artillery shell production. Also affirmed for follow-on cooperation is the modernization of aircraft avionics to improve Chinese defense against invading armed aircraft. In addition, cooperation in other types of military technology was discussed in a preliminary fashion.

During the June 1984 visit of PRC Minister Zhang Aiping to the U.S. at the invitation of U.S. Secretary of Defense Weinberger, the two sides agreed in principle to facilitate the necessary steps to begin concrete realization of cooperation in the three projects cited above. It was also agreed that continued discussion of various other mission areas and defense systems was useful and desirable.

This extended defense cooperation between two former enemies was further underlined by the requirements stipulated in the Joint Strategic Capabilities Plan (JSCP) for 1984, which included the following tasks:

- Encourage China to provide overflight rights, including refueling and provisioning, to U.S. aircraft in case of a war with the Soviet Union;
- Encourage and support China in its efforts to "preclude Soviet hegemony in Asia;"
- The U.S. should be prepared to provide security assistance to China in the event of a Soviet aggression;
- A planning option to neutralize or contain Vietnamese actions or prevent the USSR from using Vietnamese bases to conduct operations against the United States, its friends, and its allies.

In a strange contrast to these close military relations, however, JSCP 84 also directed PACOM to draft a conceptual plan (CONPLAN) for the employment of nuclear weapons against the power projection capabilities of China. This requirement, which clearly seemed out of tune with new relationship between the two nations, was dropped in the JSCP for 1985.

Taiwan remained a contentious issue. Although China had not renounced the use of force, it adopted a position of peaceful reunification with the mainland. Moreover, an agreement had been reached in August 1982 between China and the United States according to which U.S. sales to Taiwan would not exceed, either in quantitative or qualitative terms, the level of those supplied since 1979, and the U.S. intended to reduce those sales, leading to final resolution on the issue, CINCPAC described.

On the Korean peninsula, a new development was Pyongyang's proposed North Korean-U.S. talk in which South Korea would be permitted to participate. Washington responded that the future of the Korean Peninsula was a north-south issue and required participation Seoul. Moreover, the State Department said that quadripartite talks involving China as well would be preferable. Little additional progress was made but Chinese officials subsequently indicated that North Korea might propose North-South Korean talks to be held in China with the Chinese and American's as observers.

All tables relating to the details of Chinese nuclear force developments were withheld in error by the CINCPAC FOIA office. A new request for those pages is currently under review and will be made available when released. In sharp contrast with CINCPAC's withholdings, however, a [Defense Estimate Brief](#) by the Defense Intelligence Agency on nuclear weapons systems in China, which was released under FOIA to the [National Security Archive](#), discloses the Chinese forces in great detail. The Brief states that China's nuclear stockpile included some 150 to 160 nuclear warheads, which is significantly less than the 380 warheads cited by [unofficial sources](#). The Brief also states that China conducted 29 nuclear tests between 1964 and April 1984, which is one less than [unofficial sources](#) have estimated.

Selected pages of the China-related sections from the 1984 CINCPAC history are provided below:

Commander in Chief, U.S. Pacific Command, "CINCPAC Command History 1984," September 27, 1985, Volume 1. Only selected pages. Partially declassified and released under FOIA. (0.72 MB)

Commander in Chief, U.S. Pacific Command, "CINCPAC Command History 1984," September 27, 1985, Volume 3. Only

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