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SNIE 13-10-68 - COMMUNIST CHINA'S ICBM AND SUBMARINE-LAUNCHED BALLISTIC MISSILE PROGRAMS

Title:	SNIE 13-10-68 - COMMUNIST CHINA'S ICBM AND SUBMARINE-LAUNCHED BALLISTIC MISSILE PROGRAMS
Abstract:	
Pages:	0011
Pub Date:	9/19/1968
Release Date:	5/17/2004
Keywords:	COMMUNIST CHINA BALLISTIC MISSILES ICBM WEAPONS PROGRAM
Case Number:	DS-2004-00001
Copyright:	0
Release Decision:	RIPPUB
Classification:	U

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APPROVED FOR RELEASE
DATE: MAY 2004

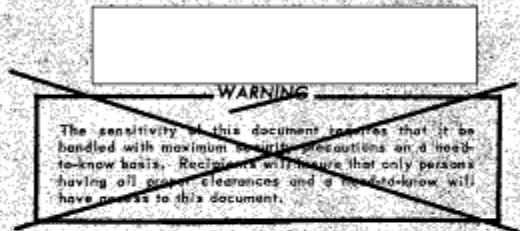
SNIE 13-10-68
19 September 1968

(S) (1)
(S) (3)

SPECIAL NATIONAL INTELLIGENCE ESTIMATE
NUMBER 13-10-68

COMMUNIST CHINA'S ICBM AND SUBMARINE-LAUNCHED
BALLISTIC MISSILE PROGRAMS

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Concurred in by the

UNITED STATES INTELLIGENCE BOARD

As indicated overleaf

19 September 1968

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The following intelligence organizations participated in the preparation of this estimate:

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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

19 September 1968

SUBJECT: SNIE 13-10-68: COMMUNIST CHINA'S ICBM AND SUBMARINE-
LAUNCHED BALLISTIC MISSILE PROGRAMS

THE PROBLEM

To assess China's intercontinental ballistic missile and submarine-launched ballistic missile programs and to estimate the nature and size of these programs through 1975.^{1/}

^{1/} This SNIE supersedes relevant sections of SNIE 13-10-67, "Chinese Reactions to a Certain US Course of Action," dated 3 August 1967, TOP SECRET, ALL SOURCE. It is an interim estimate prepared in response to a specific request. All aspects of China's strategic weapons program will be discussed in detail in NIE 13-8-68, "Communist China's Strategic Weapons Program," which is scheduled for publication in December.

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THE ESTIMATE

I. THE INTERCONTINENTAL BALLISTIC MISSILE PROGRAM

1. In early 1967 it appeared that the Chinese had virtually completed the necessary facilities at the Shuang-cheng-tzu Missile Test Range to begin an intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) test program. Within a few months, however, they began major new construction at this facility. Recent photography confirms that the original launch pad (designated pad B-1) is being extensively modified and what appears to be an umbilical tower has been added. Another launch pad of a different design (designated pad B-2) is under construction. The new pad, however, probably will be served by the gantry erected for pad B-1. A control bunker to serve the new pad has been built. Numerous other installations, including provision for additional fuel and water storage for the entire complex, are also under construction.

2. We can only speculate at this point as to the reasons for these developments. One possibility is that management failures, owing partly to political turmoil, resulted in lack of coordination

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between missile designers and those in charge of range facility construction. Or the correction of design errors in the missile system could have forced alterations. It is also possible that all of these changes, especially the construction of a new pad at the test range, reflect major changes in missile design.

3. One thing is increasingly clear from this experience and from our general observations of Chinese military programs; the Chinese are consuming more time in the development and production of modern weapons than previously seemed likely on the basis of their apparent progress several years ago. Some of this delay is almost certainly due to the disruptions and confusion of the Cultural Revolution. There is ample evidence not only of production and transportation delays throughout the economy but also of political disorders within key organizations involved in directing and operating the advanced weapons programs.

4. More basic and of continuing significance beyond the present period of turmoil is China's lack of a broadly based scientific-industrial establishment. It is one thing to put together teams of select scientific personnel for research and development; it is quite another to manage the complex processes

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and to produce in quantity the components of advanced weapons in a country possessing only a small pool of trained manpower and few sophisticated industrial plants and machines. The advantages to China of following the pioneering work of others and the benefits of being able to obtain much useful data, materials, and equipment from Japanese and Western sources have not, and we think for some time will not, offset these basic shortcomings.

5. All this is not to say, of course, that Chinese advanced weapons programs are doomed to stagnation, or continuous delays. Peking has already made substantial investments in its effort to develop an ICBM and a thermonuclear warhead and the program is moving forward. But it does suggest caution in estimating the probable rate of progress over the next few years, particularly with respect to the production and deployment of complex missile systems.

6. Present evidence suggests that pad B-1 could be ready for use by the end of this year or early in 1969, and flight testing could begin, assuming that test vehicles are ready. From whatever time the Chinese begin testing we estimate it would take at least three years to achieve an initial operational

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[redacted] [redacted]

capability (IOC).^{2/} Such a test period is comparable to Soviet and US experience with first generation ICBMs. Thus, an IOC in early 1972 is possible; but in light of the Chinese record and considering general political and economic conditions in China, it is more likely to be later, perhaps even by two or three years.

7. The recent information sheds no new light on the characteristics of the Chinese ICBM system. The test facilities appear adequate to handle thrusts large enough to carry a warhead [redacted] [redacted] to a range of 6,000 miles.

8. As for warhead availability, sufficient fissionable material, including plutonium, should be available for a modest program by the time the missile system is ready for deployment. China's last nuclear test in December 1967 was probably aimed at reducing the size and weight of a thermonuclear weapon.

[redacted]

^{2/} We mean, in the Chinese case, two or three missiles deployed with trained crews at operational sites.

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[redacted]

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Force Projection

9. We have no basis for estimating how far the Chinese will carry the deployment of their first generation ICBM. Their decision and performance will depend on political-military developments as well as on economic and technical capabilities. We believe the Chinese will not be able to deploy a large force of ICBMs in the first few years. By this we mean that by the end of the first 3 years of deployment they could probably achieve a force of somewhere between 10 and 20 operational ICBM launchers. Hence, assuming the earliest possible IOC of 1972, the Chinese are not likely to have more than 20 or so ICBMs deployed by 1975. If the Chinese made a maximum effort and were successful, they could conceivably double that number. But we believe the chances for delays and difficulties are high and it would be unrealistic to estimate that the Chinese would reach a force level of 40 or so ICBM launchers by 1975. There is no evidential basis for estimating the accuracy and reliability of China's first ICBM, but we believe that they will fall considerably below present Soviet performance.

10. A major attempt to put the first generation ICBM in hardened sites or to develop a second generation system would

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retard deployment of their first system. We believe it is unlikely that the Chinese could deploy hardened first generation missiles before 1974 at the earliest. Though a large solid propellant facility is under construction at Hu-ho-hao-te, the Chinese probably will not be able to deploy a solid propellant ICBM before 1975.

11. The Chinese could probably develop relatively simple exoatmospheric decoys, e.g., balloons, by the time of first deployment. The development of an effective chaff system and of sophisticated, endoatmospheric decoys almost certainly could not be accomplished by 1975. Multiple reentry vehicles are also unlikely to be available by this time. Though the first generation warhead may have some inherent hardness, we have no basis for making quantitative estimates about the hardness of this or future warheads.

II. MISSILE SUBMARINES

12. The Chinese launched a G-class submarine in October 1964. We believe this boat has not done any missile firing and in general has not been active.

If construction were to begin soon,

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a maximum of three or four boats could be constructed by 1975 and be equipped with missiles with a range of 350 miles or so. But the G-class submarine probably would be able to fire only when on the surface, and the Chinese would have major problems operating far from their bases. Hence we believe that the Chinese will not look to diesel-powered missile submarines as a means of threatening US territory. We estimate that the Chinese will not be able to develop a nuclear-powered submarine before the late 1970's at the earliest.

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