

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE
DIRECTOR OF INTELLIGENCE AND RESEARCH

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To : The Secretary
Through: S/S
From : INR - Thomas L. Hughes *tlw*

Subject: Chinese MRBM Deployment Delayed

According to an estimate made in late 1966, the Chinese Communists were expected to be able to deploy a few medium-range ballistic missiles (MRBM) with fission warheads in 1967. Thus far, however, we have had no reliable evidence that any such deployment has taken place. There is some possibility that the MRBM program may have fallen behind schedule, perhaps as a result of disruption caused by the Cultural Revolution or because of technical problems and/or changes in plans. A third explanation is that the estimate itself was inaccurate although it seemed consonant with the rapid pace of the weapons program in 1966 and much of 1967. In any case, any delay in MRBM emplacement is not expected to be of long duration, and the Chinese may well begin deployment this year.

Intentions to Protect Program from Cultural Revolution. Early in the Cultural Revolution, the regime indicated its intention to isolate weapons development from undue Red Guard interference. The decision of the Central Committee, issued following the August 1966 plenum dealing with the general lines of the Cultural Revolution, declared that "Those scientists and technical personnel who have made contributions should be protected." The strides that the program made during 1966 and 1967 seemed to indicate that it was being insulated to some extent from the disruptions of the Cultural Revolution. In October 1966, the Chinese exploded what was probably a missile-borne low yield

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SECRET/NO FOREIGN DISSEM

- 2 -

fission device and in December of the same year it carried out another test. In June 1967, China detonated a thermonuclear device which produced a yield of a few megatons. With regard to missiles, over-the-horizon radar gave indications during 1967 of 29 missile firings at ranges up to about 1,000 miles. A major portion of these firings were concentrated in the months of May and June 1967, when Cultural Revolution disorders in various parts of China were on the rise.

Total Insulation Not Achieved. Despite the evidence of progress, there have been some signs that the advanced weapons programs did not remain totally isolated from Cultural Revolution disorders. At various times during 1967, Red Guard posters and newspapers, as well as broadcasts carried over the official radio, spoke of factional disputes in scientific research organizations and of the need to counter unhealthy ideological trends in these units. For example, a broadcast in January 1967 quoted Red Guard spokesmen on the existence of "departmentalism, cliquism, decentralism...and other erroneous tendencies" in the State Scientific and Technical Commission, a body which is believed to have over-all supervision of the advanced weapons programs. More recently, a widely reported speech by Chou En-lai referred more pointedly to difficulties possibly connected with missile development. Speaking to representatives of national defense industries and research institutes on January 18, 1968, Chou indicated that military industries were beset by factional troubles. He referred specifically to two groups which had been associated previously by Red Guard newspapers with the Seventh Ministry of Machine Building, the Ministry believed to be in charge of missile production. Chou also mentioned

SECRET/NO FOREIGN DISSEM

SECRET/NO FOREIGN DISSEM

- 3 -

sabotage and the destruction of factory equipment, although it was unclear whether this had to do with weapons-related installations. A concrete instance of possible disruption of advanced weapons work was a report that, early in 1968, members of a research organization in Sinkiang (the province in which the Lop Nor nuclear test site is situated) were advised to take a vacation since the authorities could not prevent interference by Red Guards in their work.

It would be reasonable to assume from these reports that the Cultural Revolution has at least lapped at the edges of the weapons program, and may indeed have penetrated deeply and perhaps disruptively into it. The extent of its interference with the program, however, and the duration of any deleterious effects are impossible to determine.

Fears Over Deployment. Aside from possible Cultural Revolution interferences with the process of missile development, it has been speculated that persistent and widespread factional fighting has made the regime reluctant to deploy missiles in areas where they might be seized by anti-Mao elements. (This conjecture figured in an April 21 New York Times article.) This would seem to be one valid line of speculation, although there is little basis for making an accurate judgment. On the one hand, the regime may feel that it would be best to wait for a return to relatively complete stability before deploying missiles; on the other, there has been no evidence that vitally important military bases have been seized by factional groups, and there is no reason to believe that the regime could not ensure military protection for a few scattered missile sites.

SECRET/NO FOREIGN DISSEM

SECRET/NO FOREIGN DISSEM

- 4 -

Technical Factors or Changes in Plans. It is similarly impossible to assess what role technical difficulties or changes in plans may have played in a delay in the deployment of MRBM's. Technical troubles of one sort or another would be a potential difficulty in almost any phase of the program. As for changes in plans, there is some chance that Peking may have held up the deployment of MRBM's until a thermonuclear warhead, rather than a low yield fission warhead, could be fitted to the missiles. The seventh nuclear test in December 1967, which went unannounced by Peking and which is believed to have been a failure of a thermonuclear device, may have been a step in a program to develop such a warhead.

Deployment on the Way. Regardless of the apparent delays, the Chinese are believed to be aiming for MRBM deployment and may put a few such weapons in position some time during this year. One sign pointing in this direction has been the creation of a new military branch of service which is believed to be associated with missile deployment. This new branch, the 2nd Artillery Corps, first cropped up inconspicuously in public Chinese media in the summer of 1967. Since the fall, however, it has appeared regularly in listings of military branches ahead of the Artillery Corps and immediately after the Air Force and Navy. The new branch was accorded a good deal of publicity in February 1968 following a meeting of Mao-study activists who were among its members. When the Soviet Union first established its offensive missile command, that new body drew heavily on the artillery for men and equipment. In the same manner, Peking, which relied on Soviet doctrine and assistance in the earlier stages of its missile program, may be gearing the 2nd Artillery Corps for missile deployment functions.

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