

**March 27, 1967**

**Intelligence Note 242 from George C. Denney, Jr., to  
the Secretary, 'Peking May Have ICBMs in 1971'**

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**Summary:**

Years before Beijing actually deployed an ICBM in 1981, US intelligence estimated the possibility of the deployment of a "few operable, though probably relatively inefficient missiles" as early as 1971.

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## U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE

DIRECTOR OF INTELLIGENCE AND RESEARCH

*Intelligence  
Note* - 242

March 27, 1967

To : The Secretary  
Through: S/S  
From : INR - George C. Denney, Jr. *h.c.d.*  
Subject: Peking May Have ICBM's in 1971

It has been estimated that the Chinese Communists could begin ICBM flight testing in 1967 and by sometime in 1971 could possess a few operable, though probably relatively inefficient, missiles. This assessment reflects the rapid pace of the Chinese advanced weapons program and Peking's evident desire to stress its ICBM development.

Deterrent Against US Attack. It is probable that the Chinese have placed such emphasis on ICBM's partly to enhance their great-power status and partly to provide what they consider a deterrent against the employment of US nuclear weapons against China. As far as the deterrent qualities of their ICBM are concerned, there is a good possibility that the Peking leaders may not share the view that a sound deterrent must involve the capacity to retaliate massively after having been attacked. They may well feel that a few of their ICBM's could be launched against the United States even after they had suffered a nuclear strike, and that the fear of this relatively small-scale retaliation would be enough to put restraints on the US. These restraints, in turn, Peking may feel, would operate to permit China a greater degree of militancy and political leverage in Asia. They would, Peking may calculate, inhibit the US response to the outbreak of "people's wars" and would raise doubts in the minds of America's allies and friends as to whether the US would brave a possible nuclear attack on its soil in order to honor its treaty commitments and other assurances.

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No Sign of Offensive Use. There is no reason to believe that the Chinese would be inclined to use ICBM's offensively or even to rattle them too violently. Peking has displayed an eminent degree of caution and realism in its approach to the US, which it knows will remain incomparably stronger even after the Chinese acquire operable ICBM's. Nor have the Chinese been anxious to engage in nuclear blackmail with the few deliverable weapons they may already possess. Nevertheless, it will undoubtedly give some fillip to the ambitions and confidence of Peking's leaders to feel that, by pressing a button, they will be able to wreak havoc on a few major American cities.

Relations with Soviets. The Chinese undoubtedly figure that even a small arsenal of ICBM's would have the same deterrent effect on the USSR as it would on the US and would permit them to deal on a more nearly equal basis with the Soviets. They might also expect their new weapons to allow them to exert greater influence on Mongolia and India, where doubts might arise over the readiness of the Soviet Union to lend assistance in case of a Chinese attack.

Proliferation, ABM, Accommodation. Apart from the new confidence and the freer hand which Peking might expect to gain from an ICBM arsenal, its possession of such weapons presumably will lend weight to arguments being made in countries like India and Japan in favor of acquiring independent nuclear missile capabilities. Chinese possession of ICBM's might also spur appeals for stronger US (or Soviet) commitments to Asian defenses, for deployments of ABM systems to protect the area, and, on the part of some, for accommodation with China.

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