

U.S. Intelligence and China: Collection, Analysis, and Covert Action

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The victory of Communist forces in the Chinese civil war on October 1, 1949, resulting in the formation of the People's Republic of China (PRC), referred to as China in this collection, and the retreat of the Chinese Nationalist regime to Taiwan, produced one nation that the United States would consider a bitter adversary for many years and another, the Republic of China, referred to as Taiwan, that was and is considered an ally.

Naturally, a nation of several hundred million people under the command of a Communist regime -- a particularly radical one -- became the target of U.S. intelligence collection, gathered by a variety of means, including human sources, signals intelligence, overhead imagery, and other lesser-known techniques.

This intelligence was then employed to produce finished intelligence on a diverse range of topics -- foreign policy; military capabilities and policies; domestic/regime politics and internal conditions; science, technology, and industry; and the economic situation. In addition, a large number of biographies of Chinese military and civilian officials, in a plethora of forms, were produced, by a multitude of organizations, including those concerned with national intelligence, departmental intelligence agencies, military service intelligence units, and the intelligence directorates or centers of military commands.

In addition to helping shape U.S. policy toward China, such intelligence (including the identification of possible nuclear or other military facilities) was at times used in planning further collection activities as well as in guiding the covert action operations undertaken in the 1950s and 1960s by the U.S. and Taiwan that attempted to weaken the Communist regime's hold on the mainland.

The Nationalist regime on Taiwan was not only an ally in conducting covert action operations directed against the PRC, but also provided significant assistance in U.S. intelligence-gathering efforts targeted on the mainland -- providing pilots to fly aerial reconnaissance missions near and over the PRC as well as allowing the establishment of a key signals intelligence station on Taiwan.

But that alliance did not preclude the U.S. from gathering intelligence about the Nationalist regime. As with many other allies, the U.S. Intelligence Community sought to assess Taiwan's foreign policy, military capabilities, domestic policies, and economy. In particular, over the years the community was concerned with the possibility of a PRC-Taiwan clash (whether over islands in the Taiwan Straits or Taiwan itself), Taiwan's production of conventional arms, and its occasional quest to develop nuclear weapons. As was the case with the PRC, a number of different means of collection were employed and more than a few agencies interpreted the data and issued a variety of intelligence products.

Collection

The U.S. effort to peer behind the so-called "Bamboo Curtain" and spy on events taking place inside mainland China during the Cold War was often an exercise in frustration for the U.S. Intelligence Community. Several problems plagued collection efforts against Communist China, particularly during the Cold War era. First, the sophisticated, multi-layered Chinese internal security system consistently thwarted the best efforts of the U.S. Intelligence Community and its foreign partners to penetrate China. All available evidence indicates that the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) was unable to recruit any high-level agents within the Chinese government or military, nor was the agency or its foreign partners ever able to organize and operate for any significant period of time networks of low-level agents on the Chinese mainland.

In addition, Chinese communications security practices and procedures were so strict and pervasive that they effectively strangled the efforts of America's eavesdropping organization, the National Security Agency (NSA), to break into virtually all high-grade Chinese codes and ciphers. As a result, during the 1950s and 1960s overhead imagery – including U-2 missions and, starting in 1960, satellite reconnaissance – of the Chinese mainland was the preeminent source of hard intelligence about what was going on inside China. After the termination of the U-2 missions in 1968, satellite reconnaissance – in the form of imagery and new classes of signals intelligence satellites – became the major means of collection.

In addition, China was consistently treated as a second-tier priority by the senior management of the U.S. Intelligence Community, with the Chinese target always receiving a fraction of the fiscal, manpower, and equipment resources that were employed in the collection effort against the Soviet Union and its Eastern European allies. As of 1975, the U.S. Intelligence Community's target coverage was divvied up as follows: the USSR and Eastern Europe: 65 percent, Asia: 25 percent, the Middle East: 7 percent, Latin America: 2 percent; and the rest of the world: 1 percent.¹ As of 1980, almost 60 percent of the U.S. Intelligence Community's collection resources were dedicated to the Soviet and Eastern European targets. By 1989, the year that the Berlin Wall fell, more than 50 percent of the community's assets were still devoted to intelligence coverage of the Soviet Union, with less than 15 percent of the community's collection resources devoted to the PRC.²

The result was a combination of success and failure in monitoring and understanding developments in the PRC – whether it was the progress of China's nuclear weapons program or developments in the Chinese economy. Taiwan was a much smaller, less important, and more accessible target – and U.S. collection efforts did produce some successes that were valuable in allowing the U.S. to influence Taiwan's nuclear policy in the direction it preferred.

Human Intelligence

The attempts of the CIA to conduct conventional human intelligence (HUMINT) collection operations inside mainland China during the Cold War, both unilaterally and in conjunction with its foreign partners, were, for the most part, a series of abysmal failures. The inability of the CIA's Clandestine Service to penetrate the so-called "Bamboo Curtain" meant that the U.S. Intelligence Community necessarily came to depend on technical collection systems for much of what it knew about what was going on inside China.

The efforts of the CIA's predecessor organizations, the Strategic Services Unit (SSU) and the Central Intelligence Group (CIG), in China between the end of World War II in August 1945 and the fall of the mainland to Mao Zedong's Communist forces in the fall of 1949, were marred by a variety of problems – lack of clear direction, mismanagement of resources, uneven production, perpetual turf wars with the State Department and the U.S. military, and a series of unfortunate operational missteps that damaged the credibility of the information being produced by the CIA. For instance, in April 1946 a crisis erupted when U.S. military officials discovered that SSU operatives were spying on the activities of the senior U.S. military commander in China, General Alfred C. Wedermeyer. The SSU denied the charges, but the organization's credibility with the U.S. military was damaged beyond repair by the incident.³

Declassified documents reveal that a state of near-perpetual internecine warfare existed between the State Department and the CIA throughout the Chinese civil war. U.S. diplomats in China almost to a man viewed the CIA as an unwanted intruder on their turf. CIA's intelligence collection efforts in China were widely viewed by the diplomats as not only provocative, but also dangerous, and they did everything in their power to try to curtail the agency's efforts.⁴

The rancorous relationship between State and the CIA had a debilitating effect on the intelligence effort in China. By the fall of 1948, with the military situation in China deteriorating rapidly, the fratricidal conflict between the State Department and the CIA escalated to the point that U.S. diplomats actually tried to get the CIA barred from operating in China.⁵

On January 31, 1949, Beijing fell to Mao's forces without a fight. Even the staunchest supporters of Chiang Kai-shek in Washington knew that the loss of Beijing marked the beginning of the end for the Chinese Nationalist regime. It also marked the beginning of the end of the U.S. intelligence presence in China. Shortly after Mao's forces captured Beijing, the State Department formally asked the CIA to withdraw its personnel from China because their work, according to the State Department, was: "... causing State operational people a lot of concern."

The CIA had no choice but to comply. On March 4, 1949, CIA director Admiral Roscoe Hillenkoetter ordered that all CIA personnel be withdrawn from China. The CIA hastily evacuated most of the officers and support staff of its huge Shanghai station by ship to Taiwan. By the end of March 1949, the CIA stations at Shanghai and Canton had been closed, leaving only a small station in Hong Kong to report what was going on inside China.⁶

By September 1949, virtually all of the CIA's agent networks that had been left behind in China had collapsed or been destroyed by the Chinese Communist security services. The same was true of the U.S. military's much smaller network of intelligence sources within China. By September 1949, the deterioration of the intelligence situation in China had become so pronounced that the Army assistant chief of staff for intelligence (G-2) was forced to report that "with the reduction of agencies collecting intelligence for the Intelligence Division in China, there has been a serious decrease in the amount and completeness of information received from this area."⁷

One would naturally expect that the CIA would have called upon the resources of their English-speaking intelligence partners, especially Great Britain, to augment their deficient coverage of events taking place inside China. The British foreign intelligence and security services, the Secret Intelligence Service (SIS) – commonly known as MI6 – and the Security Service – better known as "MI5" – maintained sizable stations in Hong Kong, which devoted their resources to spying on events taking place in southern China. And since Britain had recognized Mao Zedong's government in November 1949, the British retained their embassy in Beijing and consulates in Mukden, Shanghai, and Canton. From these diplomatic establishments, SIS and the British Foreign Office were able to gather some very valuable intelligence about what was taking place in China.⁸

But while Britain's recognition of Mao Zedong's government allowed its intelligence service continued access to the mainland, it also prohibited the U.S. exchange of intelligence information with its British counterparts on the subject of Taiwan. That embargo was codified in a secret January 1950 intelligence-sharing pact, called the Burns-Templer Agreement, and not lifted until late November 1950 – after Chinese forces intervened in the Korean War.⁹

The Korean War (1950-1953) revitalized the CIA's HUMINT collection effort against mainland China. Despite the debilitated state of the CIA's agent networks inside China, between June and October 1950 the agency's Hong Kong and Taiwan stations and the U.S. military attachés in the region forwarded to Washington some remarkably prescient intelligence reporting provided by the British and Taiwanese intelligence services on the Chinese military buildup then taking place in Manchuria.¹⁰

One Hong Kong-based source, Chen Tou-ling, the former general manager of the China Air Transport Corporation (CATC), provided U.S. intelligence with some remarkably accurate intelligence information about China's intentions to militarily intervene in Korea. On October 19, 1950 the U.S. military attaché in Hong Kong cabled Washington that according to information provided by Chen, at an emergency air operations conference held in Beijing the preceding week, the Chinese political and military leadership had decided to intervene militarily in Korea. The report quoted Chen as stating that 400,000 People's Liberation Army (PLA) troops were on the border, alerted to cross into Korea on either October 18th or October 20th. As events later demonstrated, this report proved to be remarkably accurate.¹¹ In the fall of 1950, the Dutch Foreign Ministry was also providing the U.S. with some high-quality intelligence reporting originating with its embassy in Beijing, which clearly indicated that China intended to intervene in Korea. But this reporting was also ignored in Washington.¹²

Try as it might, the CIA had little success establishing agent networks behind the lines in Korea after the Chinese military intervened in the war in October-November 1950, and had even less success running agents on the Chinese mainland. An internal investigation conducted in 1952 by the head of the CIA's Resistance Division, Lt. Colonel James G.L. Kellis, revealed that "... the CIA's contribution in Korea and for that matter in China was near nil."¹³ HUMINT collection in Korea against the Chinese forces was marred by near-continuous internecine warfare between the CIA and the U.S. military over who was in charge of these operations, which together with poor planning and the relative inexperience of the CIA operations officers, contributed to a series of bungled missions that cost the lives of dozens of agents during the war.¹⁴ The CIA's parallel program of dropping agents by parachute into China during the Korean War yielded equally poor results. A former senior CIA official later admitted that "none of the Taiwan agents we dropped were successful" and few, if any, survived. Robert J. Myers, who was the CIA's Office of Special Operations (OSO) chief of station in Taiwan from 1950 until 1953, attributed these failures to CIA officials foolishly trying to replicate OSS World War II operations in a Communist police state. According to Myers, "The totality of Communist control measures made such operations impossible."¹⁵

The result was that both the quantity and the quality of the intelligence information on China that the CIA produced during the Korean War fell far short of its customers' expectations.¹⁶ In 1952, General Matthew Ridgway, the commander of U.S. forces in the Far East, sent a personal letter to CIA director General Walter Bedell Smith complaining that "at present, the information from clandestine sources on the [Chinese Communist] forces is sketchy, vague, or non-existent. Little or no first-hand information is now being received from the critical areas of Manchuria, northeast China, and southeast Siberia; and the information which does filter through is of the rumor type, or is general knowledge coupled with some known facts or speculation." Insofar as the CIA's intelligence reporting on China was concerned, Ridgway complained that "With few exceptions, reports dealing with China contain only second- or third-hand information which is obtained either in Taiwan or Hong Kong."¹⁷

The CIA responded to the criticism by creating, in the summer of 1952, a new organization in Tokyo called the North Asia Command (the unit's unclassified cover name was the Composite Analysis Group) to direct all of the agency's clandestine intelligence gathering and covert action paramilitary operations against both North Korea and China. CIA director Walter Bedell Smith appointed a retired Navy admiral named Harvey E. Overesch to head the North Asia Command, which position he held from 1952 until 1955.¹⁸

But Admiral Overesch was unable to turn around the flagging fortunes of the CIA's HUMINT operations in the Far East. A 1953 U.S. Army study found that the quality of the CIA's intelligence reporting on the Chinese military was "not good and that the agency's political intelligence reporting from inside China was "almost nil." Moreover, the report found that "... the intelligence received from the interior of China has steadily diminished in both quantity and quality" since 1951. This led the report's authors to conclude that the CIA intelligence "... reports although important in the worldwide intelligence collection program, have proved to be of little value in this theater."¹⁹

Following the end of the Korean War in July 1953, the CIA and the U.S. military ceased their unilateral efforts to recruit and operate agent networks inside China, largely ceding the field to the larger and more aggressive Chinese Nationalist intelligence services. The CIA station chief in Taipei from 1958 to 1962, Ray S. Cline, later wrote, "the American intelligence services were, of course, not so adventurous as the ROC intelligence agencies," which was a polite way of saying that the CIA had become risk averse.²⁰ The principal Chinese Nationalist intelligence service at the time was the Intelligence Bureau of the Ministry of National Defense (IBMND). The IBMND not only controlled Taiwan's SIGINT service, but also operated an extensive number of HUMINT networks on the Chinese mainland as well as directed all guerrilla and paramilitary operations against Communist China.²¹

The declassified record shows that despite the aggressiveness of the Chinese Nationalist intelligence services in their efforts to insert agents into mainland China, the results of these efforts were meager. Most of the HUMINT that the Chinese Nationalist intelligence services collected came from agents landed by sea along the Chinese coastline opposite Taiwan, and the quantity and quality of the intelligence produced by these agents was not rated as being very high.²²

Between 1953 and 1955, Chinese Nationalist transport aircraft were dropping two agents a month into the mainland as part of a CIA-funded project to try to build HUMINT networks deep inside China. But by the fall of 1955, the agent insertion operations into mainland China were judged by the CIA to have been a complete failure, with almost all of the agents being captured or killed shortly after landing and the operations producing virtually no intelligence information. The CIA's station chief in Taipei from 1958 to 1962, Dr. Ray S. Cline, later wrote of these Chinese agent operations that "occasionally a useful item of information would get back from these sources, but they were usually low-level operations and scarcely cost-effective efforts."²³

The reason for the failure of many of these operations was the relative inexperience of the CIA case officers running the programs. A CIA history revealed that "our American staff knew virtually nothing of China and the Chinese and had no area training." One of the CIA officers involved in the program, James Lilley, who would later serve as the first U.S. ambassador to the People's Republic of China, opined that "[W]e got led into lies, deceit, deception, and traps. We were children in a big boy's game." His frustration was directed not only at untested American operatives but also at agency higher-ups who allowed themselves to succumb to Chinese Nationalist pressure to act. It fell to the head of the CIA Clandestine Service's Far East Division, Al Ulmer, and his deputy, Desmond Fitzgerald, to fly to Taipei and personally tell Chiang Kai-shek in the fall of 1955 that the mainland parachute operations were a failure and would have to be discontinued.²⁴

But the Chinese Nationalists doggedly kept at it, landing dozens of teams of agents on the Chinese coastline from their outposts on Quemoy and Matsu Islands in the Taiwan Strait between 1955 and 1958. The casualty rates among these agent teams was high, and the amount of intelligence produced was minimal. In May 1958, the outgoing CIA chief of station in Taipei, William E. Duggan, was forced to tell Chiang Kai-shek that these operations too had been an abject failure.²⁵

Outside of the intelligence reporting coming from Taiwan, HUMINT sources on China were few and far between. This meant that the CIA had to content itself with reporting whatever low-level intelligence information it could derive from interrogating refugees who succeeded in making their way to the British crown colony of Hong Kong, together with information produced by agents working for the various Chinese Nationalist intelligence services on Taiwan. Not surprisingly, the reliability of much of the reporting from these sources left much to be desired. Moreover, Chinese defectors were scarce during the Cold War. The few Chinese officials who did manage to defect were mostly low-level diplomats who possessed relatively little in the way of meaningful intelligence information of interest to the CIA.²⁶

Frustration within the CIA over the agency's continuing inability to penetrate China mounted during the 1960s. In his memoirs, Peer de Silva, the CIA's Chief of Station in Hong Kong from 1962 to 1963, wrote that during his tenure in the British Crown Colony "... very little successful intelligence work [was] done. Much was attempted and much failed." He cited as an example the CIA's repeated attempts to learn about China's ongoing efforts to build an atomic bomb through HUMINT, all of which ended in failure. The failure of the CIA's HUMINT operations against China during the 1960s led de Silva to later write that "Mainland China was simply a difficult target for intelligence penetration on the ground with human agents. We had some minor successes but 'minor' was the word."²⁷

It was not until the early 1970s that the CIA finally had an opportunity to conduct meaningful clandestine intelligence gathering inside China. After the U.S. and China reestablished diplomatic relations in 1973, the State Department opened a U.S. Liaison Office in Beijing to formally represent American diplomatic interests in China. Hidden within the USLO was a small CIA station, the agency's first presence in China since 1949, which was headed from 1973 to 1975 by one of the agency's top China specialists, James R. Lilley.²⁸

In addition to the creation of a diplomatic facility in the PRC allowing the CIA to establish a presence, it also permitted the deployment of defense attachés – who provided an important addition to attachés stationed at U.S. diplomatic facilities in Hong Kong. In 1989, U.S. defense attachés in Beijing reported on developments in the city during the confrontation at Tiananmen Square. In 1995, two Air Force attachés, stationed in Hong Kong, were expelled from China after being accused of spying on restricted military zones along the southeastern coast of China. The following year, the Chinese detained the assistant military attaché in the vicinity of a military base in southern China, where he may have been checking on reports of a temporary deployment of Su-27 fighter-bombers around Hainan Island.²⁹

Starting with the Kennedy administration (1961-1963), the CIA station and the U.S. embassy in Taipei began clandestinely collecting intelligence on the activities of Chiang Kai-shek's regime, with particular regard being paid to Taiwan's intentions and capabilities for launching unilateral attacks on the Chinese mainland. The spying effort against Taiwan intensified during the Johnson administration (1963-1969), reflecting Washington's growing apprehension that Chiang Kai-shek might precipitate an all-out war with Communist China as a result of his continuing effort to reconquer the mainland.³⁰

Taiwan's intentions toward the mainland have not been the only topic of interest to U.S. HUMINT collectors. A number of Defense Department Intelligence Information Reports from the 1970s and 1980s, produced by attaché overt or clandestine collection efforts, focused on Taiwan's chemical weapons efforts. Thus, a report from March 1975 concerned Taiwanese testing of chemical warfare agents, while an August 1987 report concerned Taiwan's manufacture of nerve agents.³¹

The CIA's human intelligence efforts produced crucial intelligence on another aspect of Taiwan's weapons of mass destruction (WMD) programs – specifically, its nuclear program. Col. Chang Hsien-yi, the deputy director of the Institute for Nuclear Energy Research, who defected in 1987, had been recruited as a military cadet by the CIA, and provided the agency with intelligence on his nation's covert nuclear weapons program.³²

Signals Intelligence (SIGINT)

On August 14, 1945, when Japan formally surrendered to the Allied Powers in World War II, most of the American cryptologic effort in the Far East, with the exception of Japan, was devoted to reading the enciphered communications traffic of America's nominal ally in the region, Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek's Chinese Nationalist government in Chongqing. During the war, the U.S. Army's cryptologic organization, the Signal Security Agency (SSA), had successfully cracked many (but not all) of the major Chinese Nationalist codes and ciphers, but relatively little emphasis was placed on translating and analyzing this material because China did not rate very high on the priority lists of the White House and other intelligence agencies in Washington.³³

The same held true in the immediate aftermath of the war, when senior intelligence officials in Washington placed China well down on the list of postwar priority SIGINT targets. For example, a June 1945 postwar target list showed the top SIGINT priorities as follows: Great Britain, Russia, France, the Netherlands, China, and Argentina. As can be seen, even the small European nation of the Netherlands was deemed to be a more important SIGINT target than China.³⁴

Declassified documents show that the lack of attention paid to China by America's cryptologists impaired the postwar diplomatic efforts of the former U.S. army chief of staff, General George C. Marshall, who had been sent to China by President Truman in December 1945 to try to mediate an end to the civil war that had broken out between Chiang Kai-shek's Nationalist and Mao Zedong's Communist forces. Within days of arriving in China, Marshall was shocked to learn that there was little SIGINT available to assist him in conducting the negotiations with the two warring factions.³⁵ On January 22, 1946, a clearly frustrated Marshall cabled Washington that the few items of ULTRA intelligence that he had received were of little or no value. He bluntly told the Pentagon that he badly needed more relevant high-grade SIGINT material if his peacemaking efforts were to succeed.³⁶

It took time, but the U.S. Army's SIGINT organization, the Army Security Agency (ASA), eventually succeeded in producing some useful intelligence material about the machinations of Chiang Kai-shek and Mao Zedong, with the SIGINT showing that neither side in the conflict had any real interest in seeking a peaceful resolution of the crisis. So it did not come as a great surprise when, in August 1946, the peace talks finally collapsed. On August 15, 1946, ASA intercepted and translated a Top Secret message sent from Mao Zedong's headquarters ordering his forces to immediately break off the peace talks and resume offensive military operations against the Chinese Nationalist forces. With the collapse of the Chongqing peace talks, the last real chance to prevent China from sliding back into bloody civil war ended.³⁷

Desperate for additional resources to cover the growing threat posed by the Soviet Union, immediately after the collapse of the Chongqing talks ASA drastically reduced the amount of Chinese Nationalist communications that it was intercepting, and discontinued entirely its work on Chinese Communist traffic. Declassified documents show that the number of SIGINT analysts in Washington working on exploiting Chinese communications declined precipitously from 261 in 1946 to only 112 by the end of 1949. As of December 1949, 71 percent of all American SIGINT intercept personnel and 60 percent of all COMINT processing personnel were devoted to the "Soviet problem," with 3-4 percent going to keeping tabs on Chiang Kai-shek's embattled regime, which eventually was forced to flee to the island of Formosa in October 1949.³⁸

It was not until March 1950, five months after the conquest of China by Mao Zedong's Communist forces, that the U.S. Communications Intelligence Board (USCIB) ordered the Armed Forces Security Agency (AFSA) to immediately expand its COMINT coverage of the new Chinese Communist government in Beijing as a matter of "extraordinary importance." The centerpiece of the expanded COMINT collection effort against mainland China was to have been a massive expansion of the ASA listening post on Okinawa at a cost of \$1.8 million, the status of which was then uncertain because the line item for this project was held up within the Defense Department's budgetary bureaucracy. Seven to eight months later, at the time that China intervened in the Korea War, these steps still had not been implemented because efforts had become lost in the shuffle during the rush to address the emergency taking place on the Korean peninsula.³⁹

On June 25, 1950, the day the Korean War began, America's newly created unified cryptologic organization, the AFSA, had very few SIGINT collection resources dedicated to monitoring what was happening inside mainland China. The U.S. Army's listening post on the island of Okinawa was collecting thousands of unencrypted Chinese commercial telegrams every month, which were being translated and analyzed by a small team of Chinese linguists and intelligence reporters at AFSA headquarters outside Washington. From these low-level commercial telegrams, the AFSA analysts were able to derive a substantial amount of hard-to-come-by information about the state of the Chinese economy, transportation and logistics issues, and even information about the movements of Chinese military units inside China.⁴⁰ But for high-level intelligence reporting on the intentions of the Chinese leadership, SIGINT sources were few and far between. Between 1946 and 1950, no effort whatsoever had been made to try to solve, much less study, the high-level codes and ciphers used by Mao's government and military. The best sources that were available were decrypts of the diplomatic cables of the Indian and Burmese ambassadors in Beijing, both of whom had excellent access to the upper echelons of the Chinese government, especially Premier Zhou Enlai.⁴¹

The overall performance of U.S. SIGINT against the Chinese military during the Korean War (June 1950 - July 1953) left much to be desired. Between the time that the North Korean military invaded South Korea on June 25, 1950 and the day the Chinese military first attacked U.S. forces in Korea on October 25, 1950, AFSA failed to shift any SIGINT collection or analytic resources to Communist China. The reason for this error in judgment was simple. The U.S. government and Intelligence Community were locked into a mindset that held without equivocation that China would not enter the Korean War, so virtually no SIGINT resources were shifted to monitoring what was going on inside China.⁴² On a number of critical occasions, SIGINT was ignored because it did not comport with the consensus opinion of General MacArthur and the Intelligence Community as a whole. For instance, between July and November 1950, SIGINT reporting detailed the movement of huge numbers of Chinese combat troops to Manchuria, signaling that China perhaps intended to intervene militarily in the Korean War.⁴³ But as a declassified NSA historical review noted, AFSA's intelligence reporting was largely ignored by Washington and General Douglas MacArthur before the first Chinese attacks took place in late October 1950, because it ran contrary to the prevailing mindset in Washington and Tokyo, which held that China would not intervene militarily in the Korean War.⁴⁴

Even after the Chinese military intervened in October 1950, AFSA's SIGINT effort against China lagged far behind events on the battlefield. For almost the next two years (October 1950 - October 1952), SIGINT produced very little in the way of hard intelligence information about Chinese military intentions and capabilities in Korea. AFSA's cryptanalysts could not break the Chinese cipher systems, which were far more difficult to solve than the comparable North Korean systems. In addition, little traffic analysis reporting was accomplished from the study of intercepted Chinese military communications, and the Chinese messages that were being intercepted could not be translated because of an almost complete lack of Chinese linguists.⁴⁵ So, what little that was known about Chinese military activities coming from SIGINT was being derived from decrypted North Korean communications, not Chinese radio traffic.⁴⁶ For example, much of what the U.S. Intelligence Community knew about the negotiating positions of the Chinese and North Korean representatives to the Kaesong/Panmunjom truce talks was derived from intercepted North Korean radio traffic.⁴⁷

The Korean War came to an end on July 27, 1953 with the signing of an armistice agreement at Panmunjom. NSA immediately cut the amount of its manpower and equipment dedicated to the Chinese cryptologic problem, and shifted these resources to the Soviet problem, which once again became the agency's top priority.

By the mid-1950s, both U.S. Air Force and Navy electronic reconnaissance aircraft (called "ferrets" in U.S. military jargon) were conducting dozens of electronic intelligence (ELINT) collection missions in international airspace off the China coastline, monitoring the growing numbers of early-warning radars comprising the Chinese air defense system. On the night of August 22/23, 1956, a U.S. Navy P4M-1Q Mercator ferret aircraft belonging to Electronics Countermeasures Squadron One was shot down by Chinese fighters 40 miles off the Chinese coast while on a routine nighttime ELINT collection mission. All 16 of the plane's crew members were killed in the incident.⁴⁸

Despite the escalating Chinese military threat and the seemingly never-ending series of military confrontations between the U.S. and Beijing over the Taiwan Strait during the 1950s, NSA's efforts against China remained grossly under-resourced, receiving only a fraction of the money, manpower, and equipment that the agency dedicated to the USSR. As of 1958, only 14 percent of NSA's SIGINT collection and analytic resources were devoted to China, as opposed to 54 percent for the Soviet Union. A little under half of the 265 radio intercept positions NSA had dedicated to Chinese targets in 1958 were focused on Chinese air and air defense communications circuits, which gives a clear sense of what kind of intelligence NSA was collecting at the time from inside China. As of 1958, NSA had 70 radio intercept positions targeted on the Chinese army, 44 on Chinese naval circuits, 12 on Chinese shipping, 120 on Chinese air and air defense communications, 4 on Chinese diplomatic circuits, and 15 on Chinese internal communications links.⁴⁹

Unable to break any high-level Chinese diplomatic or military codes, NSA had to be content with continuing to exploit low-level Chinese plaintext radio traffic and traffic analysis for most of what it knew about what was transpiring inside China.⁵⁰ These low-level SIGINT sources produced copious quantities of vitally important intelligence information during the 1954 and 1958 Taiwan Strait crises on Chinese troop movements and air force flight activities opposite Taiwan. Much of the intelligence generated by COMINT during these crises was used to target areas of the Chinese mainland for reconnaissance overflights to verify the reports of Chinese troop buildup appearing in the radio intercepts.⁵¹ The only other major area of success against China during the 1950s and 1960s was the ability of SIGINT to garner information about the state of the Chinese economy, such as details of the state of Chinese gold reserves, currency valuations, agricultural production figures, commodity export data, the amount of petroleum China received from the Soviet Union, railroad traffic volumes, and Chinese aircraft manufacturing and shipbuilding activities.⁵²

The vital importance of Taiwan to NSA's SIGINT collection effort against mainland China cannot be overemphasized. The first American SIGINT unit to be sent to Taiwan was a 27-man U.S. Army Signal Corps ELINT intercept unit, the 9493rd Technical Service Unit (TSU), which arrived in Taiwan in May 1953 and immediately began intercepting Chinese radar emissions stationed on the Chinese coastline opposite Formosa.⁵³ After nearly a year and a half of haggling between the State Department and the Chinese Nationalist government, in July 1954, a 50-man U.S. Air Force Security Service (USAFSS) radio intercept detachment was hastily flown into Taiwan from the Philippines. Immediately upon arrival, the USAFSS detachment began building a listening post on a 165-acre plot of land 13 miles west of Taipei near the village of Shu Linkou, which monitored Chinese air and air defense radio traffic. By the end of the 1950s, several hundred SIGINT personnel from the U.S. Army, Navy, and Air Force were stationed at Shu Linkou intercepting Chinese radio transmissions.⁵⁴

The 1960s were a virtual replay of the preceding decade. Resources available for SIGINT coverage of mainland China remained in short supply because of the heavy demands placed on NSA by the Vietnam War. As of 1968, only 8.4 percent of all of NSA's SIGINT collection and analytic resources were going to China, as opposed to 50 percent for the USSR.⁵⁵

But despite being starved of resources, SIGINT could point to some important "success stories" against China during the 1960s.⁵⁶ For instance, radio intercepts in the fall of 1960 gave the first indication that China was moving ahead with plans to develop and test a nuclear weapon.⁵⁷ In September 1961, SIGINT provided the first hard information as to the location of the Chinese ballistic missile test center at Shuangchengzi in northern China.⁵⁸ In June 1962, SIGINT detected a major buildup of Chinese ground and air forces opposite Taiwan.⁵⁹

Within hours of the end of the second Tonkin Gulf incident in August 1964, SIGINT revealed that the Chinese had begun heavily reinforcing their air defense units along the border with North Vietnam. On August 6, 1964, radio intercepts confirmed that the Chinese had deployed a regiment of MiG-17 fighters to Phuc Yen Air Base outside Hanoi.⁶⁰

In June 1965, radio intercepts showed that the Chinese army had surreptitiously deployed troops into the northernmost portion of North Vietnam fewer than 30 days after President Lyndon Johnson had ordered the resumption of the bombing of North Vietnam. By October 1965, the accumulation of SIGINT reporting led CIA analysts to conclude that the Chinese had between 22,000 and 29,000 railroad construction, anti-aircraft artillery, and security forces in North Vietnam.⁶¹ And much of what the U.S. Intelligence Community knew about the state of chaos pervading China during the Cultural Revolution from 1966 to 1969 came from intercepted Chinese commercial telegrams.⁶²

In 1966, the CIA ended support for the ST/POLLY ELINT flights that had begun in 1958, using specially equipped P2V aircraft. Between 1958 and the end of the program, Taiwan's 34 Squadron flew 585 ST/POLLY collection and agent drop missions over and around mainland China on behalf of the CIA.⁶³ But the cost was high. Chinese air defense forces shot down 15 of the squadron's P2V aircraft, killing 148 Chinese Nationalist airmen.⁶⁴

It was other SIGINT collection resources that allowed the U.S. to monitor targets such as PRC military exercises in the late 1960s. Thus, in 1968 the U.S. intercepted voice communications in the Beijing Military Region indicating a field exercise involving the 4th Armored Division.⁶⁵

The 1970s marked the low-point of NSA's efforts against China. NSA's SIGINT coverage of China declined markedly following President Richard Nixon's visit to China, culminating in the signing of the Shanghai Communiqué on February 28, 1972. Immediately after the signing of the document, NSA downgraded the importance of China as a SIGINT target. Thousands of NSA's veteran Chinese linguists and intelligence analysts were either let go or transferred to other missions. NSA also began drawing down the size of its SIGINT collection resources on Taiwan, where more than 1,000 military cryptologic personnel manned a huge listening post at Shu Linkou west of Taipei. In June 1972, NSA withdrew its personnel from Shu Linkou, followed three years later by the departure of the Naval Security Group Command contingent of SIGINT collectors on June 30, 1975. It was not until April 1977 that the last U.S. Air Force Security Service (USAFSS) personnel left Taiwan and turned the Shu Linkou SIGINT station over to Taiwan's military intelligence service.⁶⁶

There were, however, some facilities available to the CIA and NSA in the 1970s to monitor Chinese signals – including the CIA's secretly-installed radio intercept equipment on the roof of the U.S. Liaison Office headquarters targeting Chinese military and civilian radio traffic coming from the area in and around Beijing. In addition, the launch of the CANYON and RHYOLITE SIGINT satellite systems, beginning in 1968 and 1970, also provided new SIGINT resources that could be targeted on Chinese communications and missile telemetry signals.⁶⁷

Those new resources undoubtedly helped in collecting intelligence on the events preceding and subsequent to the February-March 1979 Sino-Vietnamese border war and briefly reinvigorated NSA's interest in what was transpiring inside China, with SIGINT providing excellent intelligence coverage of both Chinese and Vietnamese troop movements and air activities prior to and during the Chinese invasion of Vietnam on February 17, 1979.⁶⁸

While NSA continued to monitor Chinese military and civil communications during the 1980s, the CIA on the other hand worked closely with the Chinese to spy on Soviet ballistic missile tests. Under an agreement between the CIA and China in November 1979, the U.S. agreed to build and equip two missile monitoring stations in the Tien Shan Mountains of western China. The CIA's Office of SIGINT Operations (OSO) was assigned responsibility for running the program. The CIA SIGINT listening posts in China were referred to as the CHESTNUT stations. Between August and December 1979, OSO flew intercept equipment into China and installed it at two sites in western China. At the same time, American personnel began training Chinese SIGINT personnel in the U.S. and China to operate and maintain the equipment. The first of the two stations became operational in the fall of 1980.⁶⁹

The cooperation between the U.S. and China did not lessen the need to monitor Chinese communications and other signals through satellites, aircraft, ground stations (such as the one at Misawa, Japan), submarines, and embassy eavesdropping operations – the latter conducted by the joint CIA-NSA Special Collection Service.

The result of such monitoring was intercepted communications, in 1996, relating to possible Chinese financial support of U.S. politicians. In 1998, NSA intercepted communications indicating that one of China's state-run corporations was involved in secret negotiations with Iran over the possible sale of hundreds of tons of materials for uranium enrichment.⁷⁰

It also resulted in the April 1, 2001 incident in which a U.S. Navy EP-3E ARIES II SIGINT reconnaissance aircraft collided with a Chinese F-8 fighter while flying a reconnaissance mission in international airspace off Hainan Island. The aircraft was forced to execute an emergency landing at Lingshui Air Base on Hainan. The aircraft's crew spent the next 11 and a half days in confinement before being released. The aircraft was completely compromised by the Chinese, who took the plane apart before returning it to the U.S. government.⁷¹

Years earlier it appears that Taiwan's government was also the target of U.S. COMINT operations. There is some tangential evidence that the U.S. eavesdropped on the electronic and telephonic communications of Chiang Kai-shek and his senior officials, allowing the U.S. to closely monitor the planning and conduct of Taiwan's commando operations against mainland China. For example, the intercepts of Taiwan's government conversations following an abortive October 1966 raid on the mainland revealed that the Intelligence Bureau of the Ministry of National Defense (IBMND) had been ordered by Chiang to resume commando raids against the Chinese mainland after a two-year U.S. government-imposed hiatus. The electronic eavesdropping also revealed that Chiang Kai-shek seriously contemplated imposing martial law on Taiwan because of jitters about a potential Chinese invasion.⁷²

Overhead Imagery

Immediately after the North Korean invasion of South Korea in July 1950, the U.S. Navy and Air Force began conducting periodic aerial photo reconnaissance missions off the coast of China to determine if the Chinese military intended to invade Taiwan. In addition to the reconnaissance flights, the Navy began secretly deploying diesel attack submarines in the Taiwan Strait to monitor Chinese naval activities and commercial shipping traffic. These submarine patrols off Shanghai and other major Chinese ports and naval bases continued unabated for the next 25 years.⁷³

Despite the fact that China was not yet involved in the Korean War, in July 1950 the NSC authorized a series of shallow reconnaissance overflights of mainland China to ascertain if Mao Zedong intended to invade Taiwan. The White House and U.S. Intelligence Community were concerned by the mounting accumulation of HUMINT and SIGINT reports indicating that China might be preparing to invade Taiwan.⁷⁴ In August 1950, the U.S. Navy mounted a series of Top Secret overflights, codenamed Jackpot, of a number of Chinese ports opposite Taiwan. On August 18, 1950, the Chinese port cities of Nanping and Chien-ou were overflown, but the missions found no Chinese troop concentrations or evidence of a Chinese air buildup. Five days later, on August 23, 1950, the port city of Putian was overflown, but again the mission found no PLA troop concentrations or concentrations of landing craft.⁷⁵ Eight months later in April 1951, the U.S. Seventh Fleet conducted another series of JCS-approved Top Secret overflights of the Chinese ports of Fuzhou and Amoy in order to confirm that China was not preparing to invade Taiwan.⁷⁶

Reconnaissance imagery of mainland China remained in very short supply, making it extremely difficult for U.S. military nuclear targeting specialists to generate target folders for the Strategic Air Command (SAC) bomb crews who were tasked with dropping nuclear weapons on Chinese targets.⁷⁷ It was only after the Chinese military intervened in the Korean conflict that the USAF began contemplating conducting reconnaissance overflights of mainland China. On November 30, 1950, the commander of the Far East Air Forces (FEAF), General George E. Stratemeyer, sent to General MacArthur a draft of a message that he intended to send to Washington requesting permission to use three newly-arrived RB-45 reconnaissance aircraft to conduct high-altitude reconnaissance overflights of Manchuria in order to photograph Chinese airfields. The photos were needed to build target folders if air strikes of Chinese airfields were required.⁷⁸ But it took three more months before the military situation in Korea deteriorated to the point that senior U.S. military commanders in the Far East seriously contemplated using nuclear weapons against the military airfields in Manchuria and northern China. On April 27, 1951, FEAF commander General George Stratemeyer again requested permission to conduct two aerial reconnaissance flights over certain parts of Manchuria in order to collect imagery needed for nuclear targeting of Chinese airfields. The JCS approved Stratemeyer's request on April 29, 1951. Almost two weeks later on May 11, 1951, the commander of U.S. forces in the Far East, General Mathew Ridgway, gave his stamp of approval to the missions.⁷⁹

Between May 1951 and May 1953, at the height of the Korean War, a small detachment of USAF RB-45 reconnaissance aircraft based at Yokota Air Base in Japan conducted at least 13 nighttime overflights of mainland China. The majority of the RB-45 flights were flown over Manchuria for the purpose of collecting targeting data necessary for SAC bombers to attack Chinese airfields and industrial targets with atomic weapons if the Korean War expanded into an all-out nuclear war. The secondary mission of these overflights was to collect intelligence on the number of MiG fighters based on the Manchurian airfields.

The first of these Top Secret RB-45 overflight missions was performed on May 23, 1951. The second RB-45 overflight of Manchuria took place on the night of June 5, 1951. Only the first mission was successful, bringing back much needed radar scope photos of a dozen or more military airfields deep inside Manchuria that SAC's nuclear targeting specialists urgently required. The second mission on June 5 met fierce resistance from Chinese fighters and anti-aircraft fire, forcing the pilots to prematurely abort the mission.⁸⁰

Just as the Korean truce talks were about to get underway at Kaesong, on July 2, 1951, the Far Eastern Command (FECOM) chief of staff authorized two more RB-45 reconnaissance overflights of Manchuria that SAC said were needed to collect more nuclear targeting materials. The first of these RB-45 overflights was performed on the night of July 4-5, 1951 and covered the cities of Changchun and Harbin. The second overflight mission took place on the night of July 8, 1951, covering two more cities deep inside Manchuria.⁸¹ The intelligence gathered from these four RB-45 overflights was so comprehensive that USAF Intelligence was able to disseminate to cleared recipients detailed maps showing the location and types of aircraft stationed at all of the military airfields in Manchuria.⁸² Then, in August-September 1951, the RB-45s conducted three missions that overflew the Chinese port cities of Shanghai, Hangchow, Ningpo, and Amoy. The purpose of these reconnaissance missions was to look for signs that the Chinese were concentrating landing craft for a possible invasion of Taiwan, while at the same time collecting much-needed targeting data on these cities.⁸³

Nearly a year and a half went by without any additional RB-45 overflights being conducted. But on January 9, 1953, the commander of the Far East Air Forces (FEAF) informed Washington that the recent large-scale introduction of the Soviet-made IL-28 Beagle jet light bombers into Manchuria in late 1952 posed a serious offensive threat, and that by mid-February the Chinese might have one or two operational regiments of the nuclear-capable bomber. To check on the operational status of the IL-28s, the commander of FEAF, General Otto P. "Opie" Weyland, informed Washington that he had ordered his force of RB-45 reconnaissance aircraft to begin conducting overflights of the IL-28 bases in Manchuria that had been identified through COMINT.⁸⁴ Eight RB-45 overflights of Manchuria were conducted between February and May 1953 to collect nuclear targeting data on all enemy airfields across the Yalu River, including the IL-28 bomber fields, in case the truce talks at Panmunjom broke down. It is most likely that additional RB-45 overflights were conducted in June and July 1953, but no declassified documentation is available on this point.⁸⁵

In early 1953, the USAF encouraged the Taiwanese Air Force to intensify their low-level overflights of China, with coverage being focused on the ports and military airfields located on the Chinese mainland opposite Taiwan.⁸⁶ To assist in this endeavor, in March 1953 Far East Air Forces (FEAF) transferred 10 "surplus" RF-51 piston-engine reconnaissance aircraft to the Taiwanese Air Force.⁸⁷

During the early stages of the 1954 Taiwan Strait Crisis, Washington urged the USAF to resume conducting aerial reconnaissance overflights of key military targets on the Chinese mainland. Between March 11, 1954 and July 6, 1954, U.S. Navy carrier-based reconnaissance aircraft belonging to Photographic Squadron 61 conducted a number of shallow overflights of the coastal regions of mainland China.⁸⁸ As the Taiwan Strait crisis escalated, in late June 1954, the commander of Far East Command requested permission from the JCS to conduct a series of secret reconnaissance overflights of China, especially of the cities of Beijing, Shanghai and Hankow. On June 30, 1954, the JCS authorized the U.S. Air Force and Navy to perform the reconnaissance missions on behalf of the Far East Command, but under the direction of the JCS.⁸⁹ In July 1954, the

CIA urged the Joint Chiefs of Staff to intensify U.S. and Taiwanese aerial reconnaissance missions over mainland China. In particular, the CIA urgently needed aerial photography of the following Chinese cities: Beijing, Tientsin, Shijiazhuang (where China's tiny force of 10 TU-4 Bull medium bombers were then based), Tsingtao, Kaifeng, Chiaohsien, Hsuehchow, Nanking, Shanghai, and Hangchow.⁹⁰

Following the end of the 1954 Taiwan Strait crisis, the U.S. Intelligence Community largely depended on imagery obtained by periodic low-level overflights of the Chinese mainland conducted by Taiwanese Air Force reconnaissance jets. By early 1955, these reconnaissance overflights accounted for almost 80 percent of what the U.S. Intelligence Community knew about Chinese military activities opposite Taiwan. But over time, the Chinese air defense system improved, and combat losses of these Taiwanese reconnaissance aircraft to MiG intercepts and anti-aircraft ground forces slowly mounted. In May 1955, the Taiwanese Air Force reported that it was unable to continue its mainland overflight efforts, due to improving capabilities of the Chinese air defenses.⁹¹ With the Chinese Nationalists temporarily unable to perform these urgently required reconnaissance missions, on May 12-13, 1955, U.S. carrier-based F2H-2P reconnaissance aircraft belonging to Marine Photo Reconnaissance Squadron One (VMJ-1) conducted another series of shallow overflights of the Chinese mainland around the Chinese port city of Shanghai to photograph a buildup reported in SIGINT of Chinese military aircraft at airfields within striking distance of Taiwan.⁹²

Between 1955 and the time Dwight D. Eisenhower left office in January 1961, reconnaissance overflights were, by far, the single most important source of intelligence information about military developments inside China. By the end of 1955, the Chinese Nationalist air force had resumed conducting frequent low-level reconnaissance overflights of the Chinese mainland between the cities of Fuzhou and Canton, and over time expanded the geographical coverage of these missions, as well as increased the number of reconnaissance missions being flown over the mainland. The primary focus of these secret reconnaissance missions remained constant, that is, to obtain imagery of the Chinese military airfields and army installations situated opposite Taiwan.⁹³

The frequency of low-altitude overflights of the Chinese mainland by Taiwanese tactical reconnaissance aircraft increased dramatically during the 1958 Taiwan Strait crisis as the U.S. and Taiwanese intelligence services desperately tried to discern Beijing's military capabilities and intentions. Between June and October 1958, four CIA U-2 overflights, each of which was personally authorized by President Eisenhower, were flown over the coastal regions of mainland China opposite Taiwan. The Chinese government issued public protests for each of these overflights.⁹⁴

In November 1959, the USAF and the Republic of China Air Force (ROCAF) signed an agreement, whereby the USAF agreed to provide ROCAF with reconnaissance aircraft "for the purpose of conducting reconnaissance over the China mainland or other areas as may be mutually agreed upon." Pursuant to this agreement, in 1960 the USAF gave the ROCAF four state-of-the-art RF-101C reconnaissance aircraft for conducting low-level reconnaissance missions over China. But the loss of two of the RF-101s in December 1964 and March 1965 to China air defenses led the USAF in April 1965 to agree to provide Taiwan with four brand new RF-104 reconnaissance aircraft, which were faster and more capable than the older RF-101 aircraft.⁹⁵

The CIA had its own independent overflight reconnaissance relationship with the Republic of China Air Force that was kept firewalled from the USAF-ROCAF low-level reconnaissance effort. In June 1960, a month after Francis Gary Powers' U-2 was shot down over the USSR, the CIA proposed taking the aircraft resources it formerly had committed to overflying the Soviet Union and instead using them to form a U-2 detachment on Taiwan to fly highly classified overflights of mainland China. The idea was that CIA would provide the aircraft and the technical personnel to support and maintain the mission systems, but the Chinese Nationalist air force would provide the pilots to fly the missions themselves. On August 26, 1960, the CIA's proposal was approved by the State Department, and the agency was authorized to begin negotiating terms for the joint operation with the Chinese Nationalist government. The code name assigned to this program was TACKLE. On November 4, 1960, President Eisenhower approved the joint CIA-Chinese Nationalist U-2 project. A little more than a

month later, on December 14, 1960, a joint CIA- Republic of China Air Force (ROCAF) U-2 detachment was secretly established at Taoyuan Air Base on Taiwan equipped with two CIA U-2 reconnaissance aircraft.⁹⁶

On January 12, 1962, the first Taiwanese-flown U-2 overflight of mainland China was conducted, covering the Shuangchengzi Missile Test Range and other strategic targets in central China.⁹⁷ Declassified documents show that over the next six years, until they were ordered halted in March 1968, U-2s flown by Taiwanese pilots flew 123 overflights of mainland China, plus another nine missions over Manchuria and North Korea. The last U-2 overflight of China from Taiwan took place on March 16, 1968. From that point onwards, all U-2 reconnaissance missions flown from Taiwan were relegated to peripheral intelligence collection.⁹⁸

The detailed imagery derived from these U-2 reconnaissance overflights of mainland China between 1962 and 1968 was by far the timeliest and most reliable source of information available to the U.S. Intelligence Community concerning the early growth and development of the Chinese nuclear weapons and ballistic missile research and development programs.⁹⁹ The U.S. Intelligence Community's dependence on these U-2 overflight reconnaissance missions remained high throughout the early to mid-1960s because coverage of mainland China by the CIA's KH-4 CORONA imaging satellites, although important, was spotty because the vast majority of the CORONA launches taking place at the time were primarily focused on the USSR - not China.¹⁰⁰

As the strength and capabilities of the Chinese air defense system improved during the 1960s, it concurrently became more difficult for reconnaissance planes to overfly the mainland. Losses of mission aircraft to Chinese air defense fighter interceptors and surface-to-air missiles quickly mounted as the decade went along. For instance, between September 1962 and September 1967, five U-2 aircraft flown by Chinese Nationalist pilots were shot down over China. The U-2 shoot-downs occurred on September 8, 1962 over the city of Nanchang; November 1, 1963 over Jiangxi; July 7, 1964 near Shantou; January 10, 1965 200 miles south of Beijing; and on September 9, 1967 over Quzhou in Jiaying Province.¹⁰¹ On January 13, 1967, an air battle erupted over the Taiwan Straits when Chinese MiGs tried to shoot down a Taiwanese RF-104 reconnaissance jet, which was conducting a WILD RICE overflight of the Chinese mainland.¹⁰²

The termination of all CIA and U.S. military-sponsored reconnaissance overflights of mainland China in 1967-1968 meant that from this point onward, the U.S. Intelligence Community was largely dependent on imagery collected by KH-4 search and KH-7 and KH-8 high-resolution reconnaissance satellites for much of what it knew about what transpired inside China, particularly on military-related subjects, such as developments in the Chinese nuclear weapons and ballistic missile programs.¹⁰³

Despite the vast amounts of data on the Chinese military then being produced by these reconnaissance satellites, elements within the CIA associated with the U-2 spy plane continued to strenuously push for the resumption of manned reconnaissance overflights of the Chinese mainland, arguing that the KH-4 satellites had not been able to attain the level of coverage considered desirable.

In November 1969, President Nixon's national security adviser, Henry A. Kissinger, refused the CIA's request to authorize resumption of manned reconnaissance overflights of mainland China. But he did authorize the CIA to conduct a limited number of overflights of China using a long-range unmanned drone designated TAGBOARD, which was so large that it had to be launched by a specially modified B-52 bomber. A total of four TAGBOARD overflights of China were conducted between November 1969 and March 1971 as part of an operation designated SENIOR BOWL. None of the TAGBOARD overflights were rated as successes, leading the CIA to cancel the entire program in July 1971.¹⁰⁴

The termination of all aerial imaging of mainland China meant that the U.S. would be relying on the satellites of each era to provide imagery of crucial targets. By the 1990s, the U.S. had long abandoned the use of film return satellites for real-time electro-optical and radar imagery satellites. Among the images produced by those satellites in 1995-1996 included M-11 missile canisters, fighter/refueling aircraft, nuclear test preparations, aircraft and missile plants, and intermediate ballistic missile complexes.¹⁰⁵

Earlier generations of U.S. imagery satellites had occasionally been employed to monitor Taiwan's nuclear activities. Thus, on September 27, 1965, a KH-4A camera, produced under the CORONA program, snapped a photograph of the Taiwan Nuclear Research Facility. Subsequent CORONA missions in September 1966 and February 1969 produced photographs of the facility for CIA imagery interpreters.¹⁰⁶

Technical Surveillance and Emplaced Sensors

While human and signals intelligence, and overhead imagery constituted the "big three" of intelligence collection, they were not the only forms. Technical surveillance (wiretapping) or the installation of fixed sensors at specific target locations also produced intelligence concerning Chinese activities, including weapons programs.

The CIA ran some mildly successful technical surveillance operations inside China and Tibet. In the mid-1960s, the CIA was running successful wiretap operations into southern China from bases in northern Laos. The first CIA telephone tap team was sent into Yunnan Province in late 1966, tapping telephone lines that ran alongside Route 411 between the towns of Meng Mang and Moug Sing. The tap team remained in place for 30 days, tapping the line using a conventional cassette tape recorder. The team was then extracted by helicopter and flown back to their home base at Nam Yu in northwestern Laos. A second tap team was sent into China in November-December 1966. Unfortunately, the tap was discovered by a Chinese patrol, and in the ensuing firefight a CIA team member was wounded and another killed. The rest of the team managed to flee back to Laos. A third team was sent into Yunnan in July 1967, placing a tap on a telephone line that ran along Route 412 between Shang Young, China and Batene, Laos. After taping traffic for 30 days, the team exfiltrated back to Laos. Three more telephone tap teams were sent into Yunnan Province during 1967 and 1968, each of which was a success, with the teams returning with reams of tapes. But in early 1968, NSA concluded that the CIA tapping operation was not producing enough continuity coverage of the telephone lines that it was tapping, which made the value of the traffic the CIA teams were bringing back of marginal intelligence value. Based on this conclusion, the CIA's Laos Station cancelled the operation in early 1968.¹⁰⁷

Also in 1966, the CIA began performing wiretap operations on Chinese Communist telephone/telegraph lines in Tibet.¹⁰⁸ The last of the Tibet wiretap operations was run in 1969, when a wiretap was installed on a Chinese telegraph line inside Tibet. After two Tibetan operatives engaged in these efforts disappeared in 1970, these operations were halted. In 1971, the Chinese killed the program for good when they rerouted sensitive military communications away from telegraph lines that ran near the Tibetan-Indian border.¹⁰⁹

One emplaced sensor operation targeted on PRC missile telemetry began in 1965 when the Indian government gave permission to plant a device on the summit of Nanda Devi in the Himalayas to monitor signals from the Chinese missile center at Shuangchengzi. The device was unfortunately swept away by an avalanche.¹¹⁰

Analysis

As noted above, the U.S. Intelligence Community's analytical effort directed toward the Republic of China (ROC) and the People's Republic of China (PRC) has involved a multitude of agencies, formats, and topics.

Organizations involved in the analytical effort over the last six decades have included, but are not limited to, the National Intelligence Council, the Central Intelligence Agency, the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA), the State Department's Bureau of Intelligence and Research (INR), various intelligence components of the Atomic Energy Commission and its successors (most recently the Department of Energy) as well as the national laboratories (particularly Lawrence Livermore and Los Alamos), and the intelligence elements of the Army, Navy, Air Force, and Pacific Command. In many cases, analytical components of the military services have been created and disestablished, named and renamed, over the more than six-decade analytical effort.

The analytical output of those agencies has included National and Special National Intelligence Estimates, interagency intelligence memoranda, reports and studies, imagery interpretation reports, research papers, surveys, memos, and articles in classified periodicals. That output has focused on a plethora of subjects – foreign policy; military organization, facilities, capabilities and intentions (particularly those of nuclear facilities); military and space activities; intelligence organization, capabilities, and activities; biographies of political and military leaders; regime and domestic politics; economics; science, technology, and industry; and the impact of ethnic divisions.

The estimates, reports, and other analytical products have been directed toward a wide spectrum of U.S. officials – including senior national security decision makers, military officers with a range of responsibilities, security officers, and individuals involved in international economic and trade policy.

Foreign Policy

The organizations that have produced the lion's share of analytical work on PRC and ROC foreign policy are the National Intelligence Council, Central Intelligence Agency, and the State Department's intelligence organization (known as the Bureau of Intelligence and Research since 1957).

Among the key foreign policy questions for U.S. intelligence in the early years of the PRC regime concerned Chinese intervention in the Korean War. A November 1950 National Intelligence Estimate examined the "scale and purpose" of Chinese intervention, and identified six foreign policy goals of the Chinese intervention.¹¹¹

Included in late 1950's national estimates that focused on PRC foreign policy was the March 1957 estimate, *Communist China through 1961*, which examined the position of Communist China in the Communist world as well as the PRC's relations with the noncommunist world. At the end of the year, another NIE focused on PRC activities in noncommunist Asia and the impact of those activities, as well as on estimating the role and influence of the PRC over the next five years.¹¹²

Estimates and Special National Intelligence Estimates produced in the 1960s included those which examined Sino-Indian relations, likely PRC reactions to attempts to prevent North Vietnamese infiltration into South Vietnam, PRC intentions with respect to the Far East, the outlook for Sino-Soviet relations, as well as the full sweep of Chinese foreign policy.¹¹³

The 1962 SNIE on the Sino-Indian conflict observed, with respect to a recent Chinese attack on India's northern border that "while fighting is likely to continue ... the conflict will remain essentially confined to the disputed border areas at least for the near future." The 1965 NIE on PRC foreign policy noted four principal aims of the regime's foreign policy, including ejecting the West from Asia and diminishing U.S. and western influence throughout the world and increasing Chinese influence throughout the developing world.¹¹⁴

In 1968, several studies of Chinese foreign policy were produced as part of the CAESAR, POLO, and ESAU series of papers – which were not intended as finished intelligence products directed toward policymakers but were rather directed toward developing "a comprehensive knowledge base on select political issues that could contribute to building analytical capital for intelligence specialists throughout the community." The 1968 studies examined policy toward the U.S. and the diplomatic isolation of Taiwan, and foreign policy toward South and Southeast Asia.¹¹⁵

Early 1970s estimates showed analysts examining the impact of the Cultural Revolution, observing in the November 1970 NIE, *Communist China's International Posture* that "with the waning of the radical and frenetic phase of Cultural Revolution, Beijing has substantially recouped its earlier diplomatic position and is moving to compete for influence in new areas." A few months later a SNIE focused on the regime's reactions to the one aspect of the continuing conflict in Southeast Asia – developments in Laos.¹¹⁶

A decade later, the analytical product on PRC foreign policy often reflected the significant changes in U.S. - PRC relations that followed Richard Nixon's opening to China, Jimmy's Carter official recognition of the People's Republic, and Ronald Reagan's election. Thus, two January 1983 products – a special national estimate, *China's Policies toward the United States and the USSR: Short-Term Prospects*, and a National Intelligence Council memorandum, *China's U.S. Policy 1983-90*, examined recent shifts in PRC policies toward the United States as well as the Soviet Union. A little over a year later, in anticipation of Ronald Reagan's upcoming visit to China, analysts produced *Prospects for U.S.-Chinese Relations during President Reagan's Visit to China*, and noted their belief that "China will work to make the visit a success in both substance and appearance," and that "Beijing's major expectations will be in the economic area – especially on prospects for trade and improved technology transfers."¹¹⁷

The State Department's INR was also producing assessments and papers on Chinese foreign policy. In 1983, the bureau produced a study on the PRC's relations with the United States and Soviet Union. In 1985, one topic of its research and analysis was the growing ties between the PRC and the Federal Republic of Germany. A 1986 study examined developments in the PRC's arms control policies, noting that "China has shown an increased interest in several aspects of arms control during the past year." Topics examined in the study included proposals made at the U.N. General Assembly, opposition to space weapons, views on intermediate nuclear forces, the press for multilateral negotiations, and views on chemical and nuclear treaties.¹¹⁸

And while the Defense Intelligence Agency's main focus with respect to China is on the Chinese military, it also produces studies concerning Chinese foreign policy. Thus, in November 1984 it issued *China's Perception of the External Threat*, and the following July it produced a Defense Estimative Brief on the prospects for U.S.-China relations. In the latter, agency analysts observed that "China will continue to place a high value on its ties with the U.S." and that "U.S.-China relations will remain basically stable and cordial."¹¹⁹

Toward the end of the decade, in 1988, the national estimators produced *The Prospects for Change in Sino-Soviet Relations*, which informed its readers that the analysts believed that "there is a high probability of significant improvement in Sino-Soviet relations in the next six months or so that will ultimately lead to a Sino-Soviet summit" within two or three years but that the relations were not likely to improve "to the point where China moves to a truly equidistant position in the Sino-Soviet-U.S. relationship."¹²⁰

In mid-1990, in the wake of the repression at Tiananmen Square, INR produced a research report titled *China: Looking in and Looking Out*. Part of its focus was the impact of events of June 1989 on China's foreign relations – including the damage to its status as a strategic counterbalance to the Soviet Union, diplomatic failures in the Middle East and Africa, and the loss of foreign investment. A 1991 article in the INR *China Lights* publication explored China's response to the Gulf War, characterizing it as "largely passive," but observed that "conservative elders may be arguing that more active involvement is necessary to forestall U.S. domination of the Middle East."¹²¹

Military and Space

U.S. Intelligence Community analysis of PRC and ROC military and space programs has been directed at a number of aspects of those programs. Organization, training, forces in being (both conventional and nuclear), forces in development, current capabilities, strategy, and plans have all been scrutinized.

In the case of the PRC, the U.S. has been concerned over the years with use of those forces in combat (in Korea, Vietnam, India, and the Taiwan Straits), their potential use against Taiwan or other nations, and the extent to which such forces could be used for leverage. U.S. examination of military developments in Taiwan has been relevant to assessing that nation's ability to deal with a Chinese invasion as well as to blocking any attempt to join the nuclear weapons club.

Thus, in April 1953, the CIA's Office of National Estimates produced an NIE entitled *Communist Capabilities and Probable Courses of Action in Korea*, which reported nine conclusions reached by the office's analysts – including that the Chinese Communist air force had the capability of seriously challenging United Nations Command daylight air operations under conditions of high visibility – and estimated 836,000 Chinese forces in Korea as of that March.¹²²

Five years later, the agency produced a special estimate on another conflict with the PRC – albeit one that never escalated into a full-scale clash. The focus was on the probable intentions of Communist China and the Soviet Union with respect to the Taiwan Straits. The estimators concluded that “the most likely Chinese Communist course of action in the immediate future is to continue military harassment and interdiction of supply of Chinmen.”¹²³

By the early 1960s, U.S. decisionmakers and the Intelligence Community were concerned about China's development of advanced weapons – nuclear weapons and the ballistic missiles that could deliver them to targets in Asia or the United States. An early stage in the process of assessing Chinese capabilities was the interpretation of aerial and satellite imagery of missile and nuclear installations. In October 1962, the CIA's National Photographic Interpretation Center (NPIC), relying on CHURCH DOOR (U-2) photography, identified an installation south of Lien-shan, which had first been detected via satellite photography, as a missile launch site. The following April NPIC reported on activity at the Shuangchengzi Missile Test Center – updating a report from a year earlier.¹²⁴

By 1962, the PRC had been pursuing nuclear weapons for seven years, ever since Mao Zedong's 1955 decision that nuclear weapons should be part of Communist China's arsenal. U.S. intelligence collection was directed at all aspects of the PRC's nuclear weapons effort – from mining, to weapons design institutes, to facilities involved in various stages of producing fissile material, to activities at the test site. Identifying and understanding the facilities involved in the effort and their precise responsibilities would be a long and involved process – and often the estimates correctly identified facilities as being involved in the nuclear program, but were in error with regard to their specific functions. Over time, as intelligence capabilities grew and there was increasing Chinese activity to monitor, U.S. intelligence analysts came to a much better understanding about the details of the PRC program.¹²⁵

Among the early 1960's estimates of PRC nuclear and missile activities was the April 25, 1962 estimate, *Chinese Communist Advanced Weapons Capabilities*. Its authors noted the existence of “numerous important gaps and apparent inconsistencies” in the evidence. As a result, while the estimate reported on a multitude of aspects of advanced weapons development--including research and development activities, actions at a suspected nuclear facility, and missile test range operations--the analysts noted that “we cannot reach firm conclusions.”¹²⁶

Similar estimates were produced on virtually a yearly basis throughout the 1960s. A 1963 special estimate on the PRC advanced weapons program was followed by the October 1964 issuance of an examination of the possibility that a PRC test was imminent – a test that occurred one day after the estimate declared that a test might come anytime in the following six months.¹²⁷

Analysis of that test revealed that the Intelligence Community's belief that China would take the plutonium path to the bomb was incorrect. Over the rest of the decade, China continued to test nuclear devices and the use of bombers and missiles to deliver them to their targets, and as U.S. intelligence capabilities improved, the estimates were based on more solid data – although such data did not remove all uncertainty about the future course of the PRC advanced weapons effort.

A September 1968 estimate focused on the PRC's intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) and submarine-launched ballistic missile programs. It reported on the construction effort at Shuangchengzi Missile Test Center and the implications for the PRC's first-generation ICBM, as well as the conclusion that China would not be able to develop a nuclear-powered submarine before the late 1970's at the earliest.¹²⁸

In 1969 and 1970, there were two versions of the advanced weapons estimate as well as a memorandum to holders. The first of those documents, *Communist China's Strategic Weapons Program*, was issued in February 1969 and sought to "assess China's strategic weapons program and to estimate the nature, size, and progress of these programs through the mid-1970s." A section on the PRC nuclear program examined China's eight nuclear tests, its pursuit of a thermonuclear capability, nuclear materials production, delivery systems (bombers, medium range ballistic missiles, intercontinental ballistic missiles), and the space program. With regard to the latter, the estimators wrote that "We believe that for reasons of national prestige the Chinese will attempt to orbit a satellite as soon as possible."¹²⁹

A revised version of the estimate was published in October 1969, after a Chinese underground test on September 22. In addition to examining weapons testing and development, it also revisited the issue, in almost seven pages, of delivery systems for China's nuclear devices. Then in August 1970, a memorandum to holders of the estimate was issued to report on new developments – the launch of China's first satellite, continued medium-range ballistic missile (MRBM) firings, and the discovery that the PRC might be far along in the development of an intermediate range ballistic missile (IRBM).¹³⁰

Other estimates and reports from the 1960s illustrate aspects of the U.S. Intelligence Community's interests in Chinese military affairs. A 1965 estimate, *Communist China's Military Establishment*, examined topics such as Chinese Communist military doctrine and strategy, the military's relationship to the government and Chinese Communist Party, the strength and composition of the armed forces, the Chinese economy's ability to support the military, foreign assistance, and military industries.¹³¹

That same year, NPIC turned out a number of imagery interpretation reports on Chinese naval facilities. April 1965 reports included those that focused on the Wu-Chang Shipyard, part of the Wu-Han Complex, as well as on the Shanghai Naval Base and Shipyard Kiangnan Dock Company. A June report concerned the port facilities of Kuang-Chou.¹³²

A 1968 national estimate focused on another aspect of China's military – its general purpose and air defense forces. The estimate explored the People's Liberation Army and the Cultural Revolution, developments with regard to manpower and conscription, military production, air defense and air forces, naval forces, military capabilities and policies, the status of forces, and trends in military policy.¹³³

Naturally, analytical interest in Chinese conventional and strategic programs continued into the 1970s. A June 1970 report focused on China's general purpose and air defense forces – and indicated disagreement among key agencies on the impact of PLA involvement in domestic activities. The CIA and INR believed that the level of training was well short of normal due to the military's heavy involvement in non-military activities, while the DIA and NSA asserted that training approached normal levels in 1968.¹³⁴

A 1974 estimate on China's strategic attack programs focused on China's nuclear force development policy, the status and direction of forces and programs, the nation's nuclear attack capability, and future forces. It noted that "China's programs to develop and deploy nuclear weapons have slowed since 1971, probably reflecting a shifting of national economic priorities to emphasize agriculture and basic industry coinciding with diminished influence of the military in policy circles since the fall of Lin Piao."¹³⁵

Taiwan's nuclear program was also the subject of a 1974 DIA study. *Nuclear Energy Programs: Japan and Taiwan* examined the significance and history of the Taiwanese program, its organization and financial arrangements, nuclear research activities, nuclear power program, and the nuclear weapons program.¹³⁶

A mid-1970s interagency intelligence memorandum, which like the NIEs and SNIEs was coordinated among the relevant analytical agencies, focused on the Republic of China's arms production efforts. It observed that while Taiwan preferred to rely on the United States for military assistance, it had apparently concluded that it could no longer count on doing so indefinitely. As a result, the government was "attempting to expand domestic arms production, develop new weapons systems, and find other sources of modern weapons and advanced technology."¹³⁷

Taiwan's military was also the subject of a National Intelligence Survey (NIS) volume produced in April 1974. The approximately 20-page volume covered the defense establishment, joint activities, and the organization, strength, training, and logistics of the Army, Navy, and Air Force as well as the nation's paramilitary forces.¹³⁸

The military service intelligence organizations also contributed to the analytical output on the PRC at this time, as they did before and after. Thus, the Office of Naval Intelligence (ONI) produced a 1974 study *The Role of the Submarine in PRC Naval Strategy* and the 1975 *Capability Studies of the People's Republic of China Naval Forces*, with the latter examining the personnel-lift capability of China's amphibious force.¹³⁹

Among the DIA's contributions toward the end of the decade was its study of PRC strategic attack forces and military space activities and capabilities. A 1977 analytical memorandum examined China's perception of external threats, and economic and technical factors and their impact on China's strategic attack capabilities. In April 1978 it examined the PRC's military space effort – mission and organizations, photographic and ELINT reconnaissance systems, meteorological and navigational systems, force levels, and operational capabilities.¹⁴⁰

Among the 1980s analytical products of the Intelligence Community was an examination of China's security policy and the impact of the PRC's growing capabilities for nuclear conflict. Thus, in contrast to other estimates that focused on the size, diversity, and technical capabilities of PRC's nuclear forces, SNIE 13-4-83, *China's Security Policy: Political Implications of Growing Capabilities for Nuclear Conflict* assessed the PRC's long-run security policies and the political implications of those policies for the United States. It asked whether future Chinese leaders would change China's security policies and orientation, what nuclear forces would China deploy during the remainder of the 1980s, to what extent would China's nuclear forces threaten the United States, and would "possession of a more formidable nuclear force in itself cause Chinese leaders to pursue a more reckless or assertive course in East Asia?"¹⁴¹

One INR contribution to the study of Chinese military capabilities was a June 1987 article in the INR periodical *Politico-Military Analysis*. It informed its readers of the role of the Poison Gas and Bacteria Center in Beijing and of the Institute of Biochemistry on Hainan Island in chemical and biological warfare research and development activities.¹⁴²

A technical look at nuclear missile issues was produced by DIA in 1989. The study examined doctrinal considerations, unit operations, trends in missile unit operations, Chinese strategic rocket forces' organization and deployment, and the readiness conditions of the missile forces.¹⁴³

Some of the 1990s production on the Chinese military is illustrated in an item that appeared in the Secretary of State's morning intelligence summary in March 1996, which noted that Russia had agreed to license Chinese production of the Su-27 fighter for about \$2.5 billion in money and barter, and that Beijing had suffered serious failures in its indigenous fighter aircraft design program. Much earlier in the decade, the Army's Foreign Science and Technology Center (now the National Ground Intelligence Center) had examined the role of scientific and technical modernization in Chinese force planning for the year 2000.¹⁴⁴

A number of products illustrate continued military service intelligence unit production with regard to the PRC post-2000. In 2007 and 2009, the Office of Naval Intelligence published two unclassified reports on the Chinese Navy. In a little over 120 pages, *China's Navy 2007* examined the navy's organization and structure, leadership, political system, doctrine, submarine and surface forces, naval aviation, coastal defense forces, marine corps, manpower, officer corps, the enlisted force, unit training, foreign relations, and weapons systems and equipment. In August 2009 it released *The People's Liberation Army Navy: A Modern Navy with Chinese Characteristics*, which focused on strategy, structure and leadership, procurement, personnel, training and exercises, and outlook.¹⁴⁵

In 2010 the Air Force Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance Agency's National Air and Space Intelligence Center (NASIC) examined the applications of Chinese aerostats – both current uses and potential applications. Specifically, the NASIC paper focused on the use of airships for disaster relief, in support of construction efforts, and the military (including early warning) potential of superaltitude airships.¹⁴⁶

Intelligence

Another element of the production of intelligence concerning the People's Republic as well as Taiwan has been the element that has focused on those nations' intelligence activities. Thus, the CIA's counterintelligence element has periodically produced volumes in its Foreign Intelligence and Security Services series focusing on each of those nations. Sections of the NIS on both nations have also concerned their intelligence and security services.

Thus, the 1974 NIS volume *Nationalist China: Government and Politics*, in addition to sections on the structure and function of the government, political dynamics, national policies, threats to government stability, and internal security, included a three-page section on intelligence. Those pages, completely redacted from the declassified version of the volume in the National Archives, examined the National Security Bureau, military intelligence agencies, and Kuomintang intelligence activities.¹⁴⁷

Other reports have focused on specific elements of Chinese intelligence and security service activities. A 1969 POLO paper reported on developments in the PRC's security apparatus – including the apparent demise of the CCP Social Affairs Department – once the preeminent Chinese intelligence and security agency. In 1971, another POLO analysis focused on the evolution of the responsibilities of the CCP International Liaison Department, which had been responsible for the identification or creation and support of revolutionary groups sympathetic to the PRC.¹⁴⁸

In February 1971, an article in the CIA's *Scientific Intelligence Digest* noted that over the previous two years, the PRC had been conducting a partially successful accelerated program to collect foreign maps and related geodetic information. Two years later, a CIA report noted that "a recent order for U.S. Earth Resources Technology Satellite (ERTS) indicates a strong likelihood that the PRC is attempting to exploit the satellite's reconnaissance potential."¹⁴⁹

In addition, NPIC, DIA, and the Office of Naval Intelligence have also produced reports concerning Chinese intelligence activities – particularly their technical collection activities. Two 1960's NPIC reports conveyed the conclusions of center photo interpreters concerning PRC ground-based signals intelligence facilities. In 1965, it reported on the Tung-Ching-Shan Electronic Intercept Site – which was situated on the summit of a hill 1,368 feet above sea-level directly overlooking the Formosa Strait. In 1969, an NPIC report, based on satellite imagery, on the Tachiu Electronic Intercept Facility

enumerated the numbers and types of antennas in its operation area as well as the presence of control/support buildings.¹⁵⁰

A little over a decade later, a DIA report focused on the PRC's aerial photoreconnaissance capability. It examined the then-current photoreconnaissance force – including its organization, equipment, tactics, operational training, and operational experience. It also reported on future developments and requirements, including aircrafts, camera systems, and processing and exploitation. In 1994, the Office of Naval Intelligence produced a report on PRC space-based remote sensing programs and its ground-based processing capabilities.¹⁵¹

Regime & Domestic Politics, Internal Stability

Regime and domestic politics of Taiwan, and particularly those of the PRC, have also been a subject of repeated production by the U.S. Intelligence Community – particularly by the CIA and the State Department's INR.

In 1948 and 1949, with the Chinese civil war in progress, the CIA's Office of Research and Estimates produced a series of reports assessing the situation in China, the prospects for a negotiated peace, the ability of the Communists to exert control over all of China, and probable developments in China.¹⁵²

In 1959, several National Intelligence Estimates focused, in whole or in part, on the domestic situation in the PRC. NIE 13-59, in addition to covering topics such as the military establishment and Chinese foreign relations, also examined the impact of Mao's Great Leap Forward, communes, and conflict within the Communist Party. Another NIE, *Present Trends in Communist China*, sought "to assess the significance of the 'great leap forward' and the commune programs, and their interrelation with the question of Mao Zedong's leadership, Sino-Soviet relations, and Chinese Communist foreign policy."¹⁵³

By 1966, the Great Leap Forward had come and gone, and China was in the midst of a "Cultural Revolution." A May 1967 National Intelligence Estimate noted that "the political crisis in China continues" and "no end is in sight." And the estimate's authors could offer no real prediction as to the likelihood of particular outcomes, writing that "among the several possible outcomes, no one is distinctly more likely than others."¹⁵⁴

In 1974, INR examined the role of Zhou Enlai in another significant event in the domestic history of the PRC – the rehabilitation of Deng Xiaoping. It explored the relationship between Deng and Zhou going back to their student days, their wartime relationships, and their rivalry. It noted that the impetus for the rehabilitation appeared to come from Mao and that with regard to Zhou, there was "nothing to suggest that he was the prime mover or even an enthusiastic supporter of the idea."¹⁵⁵

Among the 1980s estimates that focused, at least in part, on internal Chinese politics was a July 1982 NIE that examined the outlook for political succession in the PRC until about 1986, and told its readers that, *inter alia*, China would remain a vast lesser-developed country, that economic development would be "halting and uneven," and "will tend to remain a closed authoritarian society." On the subject of succession, the estimate observed that "chances favor a succession to power of such officials as Hu and Zhao and general continuance by them of a fairly pragmatic course."¹⁵⁶

In 1986, another NIE, *China's Second Revolution*, noted that in March 1985 Deng Xiaoping had characterized reforms conducted since the Third Plenum of the 11th Central Committee in December 1978 as "a Second Revolution" and examined the nature of the Second Revolution, its impact on Chinese institutions and society, and how that revolution was likely to develop over the next 10 years. It also considered the path the reforms might follow and how they might affect U.S. interests.¹⁵⁷

In 1989, the CIA was inevitably reporting on, and trying to make sense of, the turmoil that would lead to the repression at Tiananmen Square. An article in the April 17, 1989 *National Intelligence Daily* reported that the death of former Chinese Communist Party general secretary Hu Yaobang had “become a rallying point for the largest demonstrations since late 1986” and that “hundreds of students gathered on Beijing campuses to read illegal posters mourning Hu and calling for greater freedom.”¹⁵⁸

When those demonstrations came to a head in June 1989 the CIA, INR, and other agencies were reporting and analyzing in a number of formats. A June 13, 1989 article in the

NID, “China Tightening the Screws,” relayed press reports that at least 1,000 student leaders and intellectuals were being detained throughout China. It also reported that on that day, the government had ordered the police to seal the nation’s border against a possible “escape attempt” by dissident Fang Lizhi. It also observed that “fragmentary evidence suggests the crackdown is nationwide and massive.”¹⁵⁹

In 1991, INR examined aspects of the internal situation in both Taiwan and the PRC.

A March 28 article in *China Lights* focused on the imminent amendment of Taiwan’s constitution “to make it more democratic and consistent with political reality,” and explored the reform timetable and the specifics of the reform. In May, an article in the same publication noted that two years after Tiananmen “there is greater consensus on domestic policy among top leaders than at any time since the early 1980s.”¹⁶⁰

Science and Technology and Industrial Capabilities

A key determinant of military capabilities as well as economic development is a nation’s scientific and technological and industrial capabilities. Thus, they have been the subject of numerous studies by the CIA, DIA, military service, and other U.S. intelligence organizations. Some of those studies focus on fundamental developments in one or more scientific areas, while others concern capabilities or activities with regard to a specific technological or industrial sector.

Thus, in 1965 the Scientific Intelligence Committee, an interagency committee subordinate to the U.S. Intelligence Board, produced *Science and Technology in Communist China through 1970*. The report examined national science and technology objectives, organization and control of the S&T effort, resources, and status and trends in research and development with regard to physics, mathematics, chemistry, metallurgy, the medical sciences, and nuclear energy. The study also considered the state of military and industrial technology.¹⁶¹

A much smaller and more focused look at the PRC science and technology capability was exemplified by a 1973 article in the CIA Directorate of Science and Technology’s *Weekly Surveyor*, which examined the PRC effort to build an experimental reactor in support of its nuclear power program.¹⁶²

A 1974 volume of the National Intelligence Survey focused on science in Taiwan. It examined the organization, planning, and financing of research; scientific education, manpower, and facilities; major research fields (including air, ground, and naval weapons; biological and chemical warfare; nuclear energy; electronics; and medical sciences); and other sciences (including physics, mathematics, chemistry, and metallurgy).¹⁶³

In the 1980s, the Intelligence Community, DIA, and INR all examined different aspects of the PRC’s science and technology effort. A 1986 two-volume NIE examined the role of science and technology in China’s modernization effort. It asserted that while the outlook for the modernization of science and technology in the PRC was favorable, the pace would be slow for at least a decade because of difficulties in assimilating technologies. It also characterized labor forces as unskilled and poorly motivated, and managers as inefficient. It did note that a more agile and responsive science and technology system was evolving, and that the modernization effort would probably accelerate military

research and development.¹⁶⁴

In 1988, INR addressed worries of a brain drain, noting that “Chinese leaders have evinced growing concerns during the past two or three years about the number of students who elect not to go back to the PRC after studying in the United States.” It judged, however, that it was “too early to assess long-term return rates.”¹⁶⁵

A year later the DIA looked at one particular industry – beryllium. The agency’s Defense Research Assessment on the industry examined deposits, ore extraction, processing, beryllium sales, and China’s pursuit of beryllium-related technology and products from Western countries. In October 1989, the CIA’s Directorate of Intelligence examined the impact of the Tiananmen incident on China’s S&T modernization effort.¹⁶⁶

The Economy

A key element of any regime’s domestic control as well as its ability to employ resources for military purposes is the nation’s economic situation. Thus, an April 1961 Special National Intelligence Estimate assessed the economic situation in the PRC. The analysts’ mission was “to assess current Chinese Communist economic difficulties with special reference to the food situation, and to estimate their economic and political consequences (a) over the next several years and (b) in the event 1961 should prove a poor crop year.”¹⁶⁷

In 1962 a supplement to NIE 13-4-62 on *Prospects for Communist China* also examined the economic situation, noting that the “fundamental economic problem faced by the policymakers of Communist China is the pressure of a huge and rapidly growing population on a relatively small acreage of arable land.”¹⁶⁸

Almost two years later an NIE, *Economic Prospects for Communist China*, sought to assess the problems and performance of the PRC economy, as well as its prospects during the next few years. However, the analysts noted that “firm information on Communist China remains so sparse that precise economic analysis is not possible and even broad judgments are subject to error.” Two years later, in January 1966, another NIE also addressed the PRC’s economic prospects – specifically, “the two factors which dominate the economic scene in China” – its “huge rapidly growing population living close to the margin of base subsistence, and the regime’s determination to invest in costly weapons programs.”¹⁶⁹

CIA studies concerning the Chinese economy produced in the 1980s included those which examined the economic outlook for 1983 (which noted that industrial output for the year would be constrained by energy shortages, transport difficulties, and planned cutbacks in investment) and Chinese activity and tactics in U.S. commodity markets (which predicted that, despite threats to reduce or terminate purchases of U.S. agricultural goods, “a number of factors” would work to keep China in the U.S. grain market). The agency also produced an assessment of China’s sixth five-year plan, which analysts characterized as falling short “of being fully comprehensive and internally consistent.”¹⁷⁰

Among the products prepared in the late 1990s by the CIA economic analysts was *China’s Economy in 1995-1997*. Among the topics covered in the 32-page study was monetary policy, restructuring of state enterprises and the financial sector, foreign trade, foreign investment in China, and the challenges ahead.¹⁷¹

Biographies

Several organizations – most prominently the CIA and DIA – produce biographies of Chinese military and civilian officials. The biographies can be employed in trying to assess the impact an individual may have on policy, identify connections with other Chinese officials, or be used in preparing for in-person meetings with those individuals.

DIA has produced biographies of both civilian and military leaders – for example Deng Xiaoping as well as General Zhang Zhen (in September 1994 the vice chairman of the Military Commission of the Central Committee). The biographies all follow an identical format – providing information on name, position, significance, politics, personal data, and career (with a listing of positions).¹⁷²

Covert Action

The U.S. government's interest in covert action against China took off immediately following China's intervention in the Korean War. This is an important and underappreciated chapter of U.S. intelligence operations in China that is worth describing in more detail because of the authoritative information now available, particularly in many of the new documents appearing in this set.

The beginnings of the U.S. government's covert action efforts in China remain opaque since the CIA's records concerning this program have not been declassified. But what documents that are available suggest that the idea of launching a broad-based covert action program to undermine the Chinese government did not originate within the CIA. Rather, it appears that it was the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS), and to a lesser degree the State Department, which originated the idea and pushed hard for its implementation over CIA objections. The starting point for the China covert action program can be traced to a Top Secret report submitted by the Joint Chiefs of Staff to the National Security Council on January 12, 1951 entitled NSC 101, *Courses of Action Relative to Communist China and Korea*, which was the first concerted effort by the U.S. government to determine how to respond to China's entry into the Korean War. Among the various recommendations contained in the JCS report was a proposal to "furnish now all practicable covert aid to effective Nationalist guerrilla forces in China." Three days later, on January 15, 1951, the NSC recommended to President Truman that he "furnish now all practicable covert aid to effective anti-communist guerrilla forces in China." NSC 101 was unanimously approved by the NSC on Wednesday, January 17, 1951, formally marking the beginning of the U.S. government's 20-year effort to undermine Mao Zedong's regime.¹⁷³

There is a fair amount of evidence indicating that the CIA initially opposed the NSC's China covert action program with its focus on building up an anticommunist guerrilla army inside China. Declassified correspondence reveals that CIA director General Walter Bedell Smith told his longtime friend, JCS chairman General Omar Bradley, that he was not particularly enthused about the NSC mandate ordering the CIA to recruit and run Chinese guerrilla forces, writing that "... the responsibilities which are being placed upon us under our Charter and under NSC directives, particularly in the field of planning and execution of guerrilla warfare activities, go beyond our current capabilities and indeed embrace operations of such magnitude that they threaten to absorb the resources of this Agency to a point which might be detrimental to its other responsibilities." General Smith was right, of course, since the Chinese guerrilla warfare programs and related Office of Policy Coordination (OPC) covert action operations would drain away resources from the CIA's core business of engaging in clandestine intelligence gathering. Regardless of General Smith's concerns, a week later General Bradley sent Smith a letter telling him, in effect, to get on with the job at hand, and that if he needed more money to fund the additional missions given him that the JCS would support his efforts to get the necessary finances from Congress.¹⁷⁴

The problem then became which of the hundreds of independent guerrilla units reported to be operating on the Chinese mainland the U.S. government should support. To begin with, as of early 1951 nobody in Washington knew how many anticommunist guerrillas there were inside China, where they were located, or who they were loyal to. Estimates varied wildly. On one hand, Chinese leader Mao Zedong publicly admitted that there were an estimated 400,000 'bandits' operating in southern and western China. At the same time, the Chinese Nationalist military told the CIA and U.S. military representatives in Taipei that they controlled 1,640,000 guerrillas organized into 262 separate operating units on the mainland, but these "official" estimates were undercut when these same Chinese Nationalist officials told an American reporter that Taipei controlled 1,975,000 guerrillas organized into 300 separate units. For its part, the CIA came down in between, estimating that there were probably between 600,000 and 650,000 anticommunist guerrillas operating on the Chinese mainland, of which only half were believed by the agency to be under what was obliquely described

as “loose Nationalist control.”¹⁷⁵

The one thing that most U.S. government and intelligence officials seemed to agree upon was that the guerrillas, regardless of whether they were pro- or anti-Chiang Kai-shek, were on the whole a petulant and fractious lot who, as a general rule, refused to cooperate with one another, much less accept orders from Taiwan. Even the various guerrilla groups who claimed to be loyal to Chiang Kai-shek refused to cooperate with one another or take orders from Taipei. For instance, in late 1950 a large band of guerrillas operating in Kwangtung Province in southern China who claimed to be loyal to Chiang Kai-shek, refused to obey Taipei’s orders because their leader did not like the man Chiang Kai-shek had placed in charge of guerrilla operations on the mainland, General Cheng Kai-min. As a result, there were serious doubts in Washington about whether the Chinese guerrilla groups, individually or as a whole, posed much of a threat to the Beijing regime. The U.S. ambassador in Taipei, Karl L. Rankin, opined that “guerrilla activities, although decidedly troublesome to Commies, are reported so little coordinated and so lacking in unifying leadership or polit[ical] program as not to constitute any apparent serious threat to the disciplined military power and mass organizational techniques of communism.”¹⁷⁶

What the OPC opted for was a dual-track approach to the problem of building a resistance movement to Mao Zedong’s regime. The first track began in April 1951, and consisted of a compartment program with the goal of recruiting a force of anticommunist guerrillas and a supporting political infrastructure known as the “Third Force” largely from Chinese exiles living in Hong Kong who were opposed to Chiang Kai-shek and his government on Taiwan. But declassified documents show that the Third Force experiment never got off the ground, for the most part because the various political factions comprising the political wing of the Third Force movement in Hong Kong refused to cooperate with one another, with the political infighting on several occasions degenerating into open armed warfare on the streets of Hong Kong. The 1952 British government had had enough, and threw the Third Force political leaders and their followers out of Hong Kong, forcing the CIA to hastily arrange a home-in-exile for the Third Force in the Philippines. The Third Force political leadership continued to battle each other without let-up until the organization collapsed from within in 1953 after the CIA and State Department ceased their political and financial support of the fractious Chinese exiles.¹⁷⁷

The second track followed by OPC was a program of guerrilla warfare and paramilitary operations run from Taiwan in conjunction with the Chinese Nationalist intelligence services and military. To direct the Taiwan-based covert action program against the Chinese mainland, the OPC recruited a small cadre of Chinese-speaking staffers and sent them to Taipei to establish a station. In March 1951, the first OPC personnel, led by the new chief of station, Army colonel William R. “Ray” Peers, arrived in Taipei and immediately took over one of the few modern hotels in Taipei as their headquarters. By the end of May 1951, the OPC station had grown to 16 personnel, then to 50 by the end of the year. Peers and his staff tried to disguise their presence by pretending to be the Taipei branch of a Pittsburgh-based company called Western Enterprises, Inc. But declassified documents show that this disguise fooled nobody, least of all Beijing, and placed the U.S. ambassador in Taipei in the uncomfortable position of having to unofficially condone their activities while at the same officially denying all knowledge of their existence.¹⁷⁸

The largest and most ambitious covert action operation mounted by the OPC in conjunction with the Chinese Nationalists against China in early 1951 was to provide weapons, training, and financial support to a ragtag group of some 5,000 Chinese Nationalist troops led by General Li Mi, who in the fall of 1949 had fled across the border into northern Burma and reformed themselves into what they called the Yunnan Anti-communist National Salvation Army. Declassified CIA documents reveal that even before OPC began supporting these forces, the agency knew that Li Mi paid and fed his troops with the proceeds from opium deals made with narcotics traffickers in neighboring Thailand, which accounted for the majority of Li Mi’s activities. Still, the OPC pressed forward with the plan to reequip and resupply the general’s forces. According to former CIA official Samuel Halpern, the idea was to get Li Mi’s troops to cross the Burmese border and attack the Chinese forces stationed in Yunnan Province in southern China as a way of diverting the Chinese military’s attention away from Korea. Despite intense enthusiasm for the plan within OPC, CIA director General Walter Bedell Smith

opposed the plan, believing that the Chinese military would make short work of Li Mi's poorly trained and undisciplined forces on the battlefield. As it turned out, he was right.¹⁷⁹

Despite the dubious reliability of Li Mi's troops, in February 1951 the OPC began a large-scale aerial resupply operation designated Operation Paper, which was coordinated by OSS veteran Sherman B. Joost, who was the head of a newly created CIA proprietary company established in Bangkok, Thailand called Southeast Asia Supply Company (usually abbreviated as "SEA Supply Company"). Civil Air Transport (CAT) C-47 transport aircraft under contract to OPC flew thousands of tons of arms and equipment from the CIA logistics base on Okinawa to Li Mi's desperately under-equipped forces via Saigon and Bangkok. In addition, the CAT planes brought in from Taiwan 100 Chinese Nationalist army officers to help train and reequip Li Mi's forces.¹⁸⁰

Under intense pressure from his OPC handlers, in mid-March 1951 Li Mi began preparing his troops for action, despite the fact that they were not sufficiently trained or equipped to take on the much larger and better equipped Chinese 14th Army on the other side of the border, which had 35,000 troops under its command. In late April 1951, Li Mi marched a force estimated at between 3,000 and 4,000 men northwards from his base camp at Mong Hsat to the Burmese border town of Mengmao with the intent of invading Yunnan Province. The expectation was that once his forces entered China, thousands of pro-Chiang Kai-shek guerrillas would join forces with him. But the Chinese knew in advance about Li Mi's plan, moving 10,000 troops to the border to meet the expected attack. With the element of surprise long-lost, Li Mi decided to cross the border anyway. On May 18, 1951, Li Mi's forces crossed the border, penetrating 60 miles into Yunnan Province, capturing five border villages, including the town of Kengma, and briefly threatening to take the Chinese military air base at Mengtze, before being repelled by a massive Chinese counterattack. By the end of May 1951, Li Mi's shattered forces had fled across the border into northern Burma in disarray. According to former CIA official Sam Halpern: "The Chinese Communists let them walk in and then destroyed them. It was a shambles."¹⁸¹

Two months later, in July 1951, Li Mi's deputy, General Liu Kuo-chan, sent a smaller force of 2,000 troops back into Yunnan Province. The Chinese waited a week, and then launched a large-scale attack that decimated the Chinese Nationalist forces. What was left of General Liu's troops retreated to Burma, taking out their frustration by looting Burmese border villages on the way back to their base camp at Mong Hsat. On the other side of the border, the Chinese military took advantage of the disintegration of Li Mi's forces to mop up what was left of the pro-Nationalist guerrillas operating inside Yunnan Province.¹⁸²

Over the next six months, Taipei secretly flew into northern Burma several hundred Chinese Nationalist regular troops to buttress what was left of Li Mi's forces. In August 1952, Li Mi launched yet another attack into Yunnan Province with 2,100 troops. Once again, the Nationalist forces penetrated 60 miles into southern China before being hit by a counterattack from the Chinese 14th Army that sent them reeling back into Burma. Only later did the CIA discover that all of General Li Mi's operations had been compromised from the outset by his radio operator, who was in the pay of the Chinese Communist security services.¹⁸³

After their third defeat at the hands of the Chinese, Li Mi's troops instantly became a liability for the CIA and the U.S. government. Not only had they failed miserably three times, but the Burmese government was furious about their presence on its soil. In March 1953, the Burmese government took the matter to the U.N. General Assembly, tabling a motion (over intense American and British government opposition) that charged Chiang Kai-shek's government on Taiwan with unprovoked aggression against the government of Burma. Under intense pressure, in 1954, Chiang Kai-shek agreed to evacuate his forces from Burma. By September 1954, some 5,500 Chinese Nationalist troops and 1,500 of their dependants were airlifted from Burma and returned to Taiwan. But 5,500 of the Chinese irregulars refused to be evacuated because (a) they were local tribal recruits or natives of Yunnan Province who had married local women and wished to remain in Burma, and (b) they were engaged in the highly profitable opium trade. Despite constant pressure from the U.S. government over the next 20 years, declassified documents show that Chiang Kai-shek steadfastly refused to

accede to pressure from Washington to do anything meaningful to force the removal of the remaining Chinese Nationalist irregulars in northern Burma.¹⁸⁴

The rest of the OPC's Chinese guerrilla warfare projects followed pretty much the same path as the abortive Li Mi program. By early 1952, the CIA concluded that the Chinese military had managed to wipe out the vast majority of the Chinese Nationalist guerrilla forces that had been operating on the mainland, especially in the traditional bandit strongholds of Sinkiang, Szechwan, and Kiangsi Provinces in western and central China. This conclusion was confirmed by the Chinese Nationalist general running the mainland guerrilla warfare program, General Cheng Kai-min, who admitted that most of Taipei's guerrilla forces had been destroyed, and that Taipei had lost contact with the few guerrilla units believed still operating on the mainland.¹⁸⁵

After the OPC was folded into the CIA in 1952, the agency's Taipei station tried to keep afloat what was left of their Chinese guerrilla warfare assets, which for the most part consisted of Chinese Nationalist irregulars stationed on a dozen islands in the Taiwan Straits still controlled by Chiang Kai-shek's forces. These guerrillas periodically launched maritime raids on military targets on the Chinese mainland, but these attacks resulted in few tangible results. The effectiveness of the guerrillas was further hurt when in July 1953 the Chinese military occupied a series of islands in the Taiwan Strait that had formerly been important launch points for maritime raids on the mainland.¹⁸⁶

The failure of the CIA's Chinese guerrilla warfare program led to the decision in July 1954 to transfer the responsibility for supporting what was left of these paramilitary assets, consisting at the time of only a few thousand guerrillas and coast watcher teams on various islands in the Taiwan Straits, from the CIA's Taipei station to the Department of Defense, specifically the commander of the Military Assistance Advisory Group (MAAG) in Taipei. In July 1955, the last of the guerrilla units stationed on the offshore islands in the Taiwan Strait were disbanded and their personnel integrated into regular units of the Chinese Nationalist Army. It was an unhappy end to a program that had begun with so much promise in 1951.¹⁸⁷

The Eisenhower White House spent the period from 1958 to 1961 trying to prevent Chiang Kai-shek from launching large-scale military attacks on the Chinese mainland, which State Department officials believed were provocative and would lead to reprisals and even the possibility of war with China.¹⁸⁸ But in early 1958, U.S. military and CIA representatives in Taiwan agreed that the Chinese Nationalists should be permitted to resume infiltration activities and raids against the Chinese mainland. But the U.S. representatives argued that these operations should be carefully planned, and be conducted on a small scale in remote areas such as eastern Kwangtung Province.¹⁸⁹ Between 1960 and early 1961, Chinese Nationalist raids on the Chinese mainland were desultory, at best. And the few operations that were conducted were generally not successful. For example, in April 1960 the Chinese Nationalists parachuted a five-man agent team into Anhui Province with CIA assistance. But the agent team unfortunately landed in the midst of a major dam construction project and was quickly wiped out by the Chinese security forces guarding the site.¹⁹⁰

The inauguration of John F. Kennedy as president of the United States in January 1961 re-energized Chiang Kai-shek's long-held dream of returning to the mainland. Beginning in July 1961, the CIA station in Taipei began picking up indications that Chiang had ordered his military to step up planning to parachute airborne and commando units of up to 300 men into southern China, which Chiang hoped would prompt large-scale uprisings on the mainland. The Kennedy administration moved immediately to block these efforts from proceeding past the planning stage by telling Chiang in no uncertain terms that all such operations had to be agreed upon by the U.S. But high-ranking White House and State Department officials were forced to repeatedly return to Taipei to reiterate U.S. policy on "Return to the Mainland" every time the CIA station in Taipei picked up some new sign that Chiang was trying to resuscitate the project.¹⁹¹ According to a declassified State Department document, "U.S. officials have repeatedly stressed the defensive character of the U.S. commitment [to Taiwan] and the corresponding commitment accepted by the Government of the Republic of China (GRC) in the exchange of notes of December 10, 1954 that any use of force against the mainland must be a matter of joint agreement. *It has also been made clear that the U.S. government does not*

*consider a GRC invasion of the mainland a practicable course of action at the present time” (author’s emphasis.)*¹⁹²

But for reasons that remain obscure, the Kennedy administration agreed in the summer of 1961 to permit the Chinese Nationalists to resume conducting (with CIA support) an expanded program of guerrilla and commando raids, sabotage operations, and parachute drops of agents on the mainland, especially in Kwangtung Province in southern China near the border with North Vietnam. The sheer scope of these operations was enormous, with declassified documents indicating that between March and December 1962, 873 Chinese Nationalist commandos were sent on raiding missions against Communist China.¹⁹³ But almost from the start, these operations, most of which Washington saw primarily as being aimed at capturing prisoners and collecting intelligence, ran into trouble. Between October and December 1962, Chinese security forces wiped out nine Chinese Nationalist teams that had landed on the Chinese coastline near Hong Kong, resulting in the loss of 172 agents captured or killed.¹⁹⁴

In October 1962, the Chinese Nationalists resumed air-dropping small teams of agents into southern China to test the Chinese military, collect intelligence, and ascertain if anticommunist groups existed inside mainland China. Between October 1962 and September 1963, 28 teams of agents were parachuted into China, with the size of the teams ranging from six to 28 men. But like the parallel program of maritime commando raids, these operations were also abysmal failures, averaging 85 percent casualty rates and causing no discernable disruption to the Chinese military. For example, in June 1963 the Chinese destroyed six teams of agents, and shot down a Chinese Nationalist P2V aircraft that had been used to parachute a team of agents into China. On June 27, 1963, the Chinese destroyed an agent team that had landed in Chekiang Province, and then wiped out a 10-man team of agents that had parachuted into Kwangtung Province on July 28, 1963.¹⁹⁵ In July 1963, a 26-man team of agents belonging to the Anticommunist National Salvation Corps was destroyed by North Vietnamese security forces shortly after landing on the coast of Quang Ninh Province near the Chinese border.¹⁹⁶

Despite U.S. government advice to the contrary, in the spring of 1964, the Chinese Nationalists shifted the focus of their paramilitary efforts from “intelligence probes” by small commando teams to large-scale maritime commando raids, sometimes involving as many as several hundred men. Many of the raids were interdicted by Chinese Navy gunboats before they reached their targets, resulting in heavy losses of life and equipment. For example, on the night of July 11-12, 1964, Chinese naval forces sank four “mother ships” carrying two teams of Chinese Nationalist commandos, resulting in the loss of 151 men and two-thirds of the Chinese Nationalist Navy’s amphibious force. All commando and guerrilla raids on the mainland were temporarily suspended at U.S. insistence after the failure of this operation.¹⁹⁷

The disastrous July 11-12, 1964 raid was the final straw for both the State Department, which had vehemently opposed these operations for years, and the CIA, which finally decided to cut its losses in a program that had not produced results. After consulting with the State Department, in August 1964 the agency abruptly terminated its financial and logistical support for what a CIA memo described as these “unproductive, infeasible GRC mainland operations, particularly paramilitary, and reduced the size of its Taipei Station.”¹⁹⁸

Chiang Kai-shek was furious at the about-face of the CIA, but wisely chose not to retaliate by shutting down or interfering with other U.S. intelligence collection activities being conducted on Taiwan. Instead, Chiang and his intelligence chiefs decided to go it alone without any assistance from the CIA or U.S. military, and resumed conducting maritime commando raids against the mainland using their own resources. The failure rate of these commando raids accelerated after they resumed in early 1965. For instance, the landing of a 16-man raiding party on the Chinese coast on August 6, 1965 led to a naval battle near Tungshan Island that resulted in the sinking of two Taiwanese warships and almost required the intervention of the U.S. Seventh Fleet.¹⁹⁹ This was followed by another naval battle on the night of October 15, 1965 near Matsu Island, which resulted in the loss of four of the five

Chinese Nationalist vessels engaged in the battle.²⁰⁰ The CIA's caustic assessment of the viability of these Chinese Nationalist maritime commando raids was brutal: "The repeated failure of small-scale (about 30-man) 'butcher and bolt' raids by GRC commando teams between late 1962 and mid-1964 points up the risks of attempting coastal landings." The report went on to note that "the net effect of these raids...appears to have been only to improve Chinese Communist detection capabilities."²⁰¹

But still the Chinese Nationalists kept at it, despite repeated admonitions from the U.S. government that these operations were accomplishing nothing. In October 1966, five assault craft belonging to the Intelligence Bureau of the Ministry of National Defense (IBMND) attacked a force of Chinese naval vessels near the island of Matsu. In the ensuing battle, four of the five Taiwanese craft were sunk with heavy loss of life. Then, on May 29, 1967, the Chinese Navy sank a Chinese Nationalist amphibious assault boat near the Shantung Peninsula, killing all seven commandos on board. For the next two years, the scope and intensity of these commando raids on the mainland declined rapidly, with only a handful of missions conducted in 1968 and 1969. The last significant operation was a hit-and-run raid that took place in coastal Fukien Province on the night of July 2, 1969. Shortly after the Fukien raid, these operations were ordered terminated without fanfare by Minister of National Defense Chiang Ching-kuo.²⁰²

The CIA's covert action program against the Chinese-occupation of Tibet, begun after the Dalai Lama fled to India on March 31, 1959, also ended ignominiously in the 1960s.²⁰³ Of the 49 Tibetan agents parachuted by the CIA into Tibet between 1959 and 1960, only 12 survived. Of the remainder, 37 were killed or committed suicide, one surrendered, and one was captured by the Chinese.²⁰⁴ During the 1960s, the CIA continued to support its covert action program against the Chinese occupation of Tibet, arming and training a 2,100-man force of Tibetan exiles to conduct paramilitary operations against the Chinese forces in Tibet. A total of 133 Tibetans were brought to the U.S. for paramilitary training in Colorado, a number of agents were infiltrated into Tibet, radio intelligence information was collected by tapping Chinese telephone lines, and Tibetan refugees and travelers reaching Nepal were interrogated by the CIA about what was going on inside Tibet. The CIA also paid the Dalai Lama personally an annual subsidy of \$180,000 for much of the 1960s. But like the CIA-backed commando raids mounted against the mainland from Taiwan, these operations did not disrupt the Chinese regime at all.²⁰⁵

Conclusions

As noted earlier, the replacement of an allied Nationalist regime in control of mainland China by a hostile Communist regime, and the exile of the Nationalist regime to Taiwan had profound implications for the U.S. Intelligence Community – in its early (late 1940s) form as well as its much more extensive present incarnation. In the PRC, it had a large, important, target – which was very difficult to penetrate. In Taiwan, it had an ally in intelligence collection operations against the mainland, as well as a target – since the United States wanted information on what the Nationalists might do and what weapons they might build (including nuclear ones) as part of their efforts to resist Communist pressure for reunification as well as in support of their dream to retake the mainland.

And while Communist China and Taiwan did not receive the same priority in the Cold War era as did the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, they still required a significant effort by both the collection and analytical elements of the U.S. Intelligence Community. As might be expected, the declassified documentary record on the U.S. Intelligence Community and China is far from complete – given the millions of documents that have been generated over the last six decades concerning the collection and analysis of information concerning the People's Republic of China and the Republic of China as well as covert action operations directed against the PRC, the slow-moving process of declassification, and the continued sensitivity of many of the documents.

That limitation does not preclude employing the documents in attempts to assess the impact of intelligence reporting and analysis on U.S. policymaking with regard to the PRC and ROC, while keeping in mind that the record is not complete. An additional limitation worth noting is that it is rarely, if ever, the case that policy is based solely on the reporting and analysis of intelligence organizations

– since policymakers face both domestic and foreign constraints on their policy choices in dealing with other nations. Thus, it can be difficult to disentangle the exact impact of intelligence on U.S. policies and actions with respect to either China or Taiwan. In some instances, the reporting may reinforce existing tendencies or preferences rather than be the determining factor. But that limitation also does not prevent some reasonable assessments of the impact of intelligence on policy.

Thus, the natural reluctance of the senior policymakers in the Kennedy and Johnson administrations to take military action against the PRC's nascent nuclear weapons program can only have been reinforced by the National Intelligence Estimates, suggesting that the acquisition of such weapons would not produce a dramatic change in Chinese foreign policy. That judgment (as well as the assessment that the U.S. had a very mixed record in its analysis of developments in the PRC nuclear weapons program) seems unlikely to change with the release of more records. Reasons for such confidence include the release of all the key national estimates over that period, as well as what we know about internal Kennedy and Johnson administration debates about the wisdom, feasibility, and consequences of a pre-emptive strike.²⁰⁶

Much the same could be said, in both respects, for even later episodes in U.S.-PRC or U.S.-ROC relations. For instance, Beijing's policy of engagement from the Nixon to Reagan administrations, and U.S. pressure on Taiwan to cease efforts that clearly seemed designed to lead toward the development of nuclear weapons are both illuminated by the declassified record, even though many relevant materials may remain classified. Estimates such as the one preceding Reagan's 1984 trip to the PRC, *Prospects for U.S.-Chinese Relations during President Reagan's Visit to China*, provided reason for optimism that the trip would be productive. And while the documentary record of U.S. intelligence reporting on Taiwan's efforts to develop nuclear weapons is obviously incomplete, it certainly illuminates what is known about U.S. pressure on Taiwan to terminate such efforts.

Nor does the limited record prevent judgments from being made, with at least some confidence, about the usefulness of U.S. intelligence collection targeted on the PRC and ROC. For example, the records provide high confidence in the judgment that, at least in the first several decades after the PRC's establishment, HUMINT operations provided little information of value about the PRC's government or military activities. The documents also illustrate that early technical collection efforts (whether imagery, SIGINT, or MASINT; whether space, air, or ground based) were not sufficient to provide precise answers about the PRC's strategic weapons programs – but that over time as those technical collection capabilities improved and China provided more data to be collected (through nuclear and missile tests), the U.S. came far closer to “ground truth” about Chinese programs.

In the future, the release of additional records will enhance understanding of U.S. Intelligence Community collection and analysis targeted on the two Chinas. In some cases, records' release will provide more detail with respect to current and correct judgments on the question of the efficacy or impact on U.S. policy of those efforts. In other cases, it will produce new, revised, or even reversed judgments on these matters.

Notes

¹ U.S. Congress. Senate. Select Committee to Study Governmental Operations with Respect to Intelligence Activities, *Final Report*, 94th Cong., 2nd sess., 1976, Book I, 348.

² H.D.S. Greenway and Paul Quinn-Judge, “CIA Chief Voices Final Hopes and Fears,” *Boston Globe*, January 15, 1993, B17.

³ Cable, U.S. War Department Strategic Services Unit to U.S. Consulate Shanghai, April 29, 1946, RG-226, Entry 90A, Box 1, Folder 82, National Archives; cable, U.S. Consulate Shanghai to U.S. War Department Strategic Services Unit, May 1, 1946, RG-226, Entry 90A, Box 1, Folder 81, National Archives.

⁴ For State-CIG/CIA feuding in China, see memorandum, Wedermeyer to Marshall, "Movement of SSU into Manchuria," February 27, 1946; memorandum, Caughey to Commanding General, U.S. Army Forces China, "SSU in Mukden," June 28, 1946; cable, Marshall to U.S. Consulate Shanghai, August 1, 1946; memorandum for the record, August 6, 1946; memorandum, Eddy to Ringwalt, April 7, 1947; memorandum of conversation, U.S. Department of State, "CIG Activities in China," April 18, 1947; cable, U.S. Embassy China to U.S. Secretary of State, April 22, 1947; instruction, U.S. Secretary of State to U.S. Embassy China, April 17, 1947; memorandum, Ringwalt to Butterworth, "CIG Directive," October 7, 1947; cable, U.S. Embassy China to U.S. Secretary of State, October 22, 1947; cable, U.S. Secretary of State to U.S. Embassy China, October 23, 1947; memorandum of conversation, U.S. Department of State, "ESD 44 Operations," December 11, 1947.

⁵ Cable, U.S. Consulate Beijing to U.S. Secretary of State, September 5, 1948; cable, U.S. Embassy China to U.S. Secretary of State, September 9, 1948, RG-59, Decimal File 1945-1949, Box 7275, File: 893.00/9-448, National Archives; memorandum, Freeman to Butterworth, "Obtaining Intelligence Information from Areas Controlled by Chinese Communists," October 13, 1948.

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⁷ Memorandum, U.S. Army Ground Intelligence Division, "Information Book for Use of Gen. Collins on an Inspection Trip," September 28, 1949.

⁸ Memorandum, Denfeld to U.S. Chief of Naval Operations, "China-British Intelligence Operations In," March 4, 1947; summary, U.S. Department of State, "Substance of a Telegram from the Foreign Office to Washington Embassy Dated 28 September," September 28, 1950; cable, U.S. Embassy United Kingdom to U.S. Secretary of State, October 3, 1950; summary, U.S. Department of State, "Message Received from His Majesty's Chargé d'Affaires, Peking, Dated 3rd October, 1950," October 5, 1950.

⁹ Memorandum, Danson to Chairman, U.S. State-Defense Military Information Control Committee, "Disclosure of Classified U.S. Military Information on Nationalist China to United Kingdom," April 25, 1950; memorandum, Tausch to U.S. Army Assistant Chief of Staff for Logistics, "Release of Classified Military Information on Nationalist China to the United Kingdom," November 30, 1950.

¹⁰ Memorandum, U.S. Field Research Unit to Aurell, "Intelligence-China," June 26, 1950, in *North Korean Pre-Invasion Buildup*, Incl. 4, n.d., Record Group 23, Box 14, Series 2, MacArthur Library; cable, Taiwan Ministry of National Defense to U.S. Far East Command Foreign Liaison Branch, July 3, 1950, Record Group 6, Box 14, MacArthur Library; cable, U.S. Consulate Hong Kong, July 4, 1950, cited in Far East Command cable, July 5, 1950, MacArthur Library; cable, U.S. Military Attaché Hong Kong to U.S. Army, July 7, 1950, RG-554 Records of Far East Command, Entry 18 Theater Intelligence Division "ID" Reports, Box 8, File: C China 0106 Military Operations, National Archives; report, U.S. Army Assistant Chief of Staff for Intelligence, "Periodic Intelligence Report on Soviet Intentions and Activities," July 12, 1950; report, Taiwan Ministry of National Defense, "A Report on the Situation of the Chinese Communists," July 31, 1950; cable, U.S. Embassy United Kingdom to U.S. Secretary of State, August 21, 1950, RG-59, Decimal File 1950-1954, Box 4254, File: 794A.00/8-2150, National Archives; memorandum, Porter to Cabell, "Information for DCS/Operations Meeting," August 23, 1950, 2-3, RG-341, Entry 214 Top Secret Cable and Controls Division, Box 52, File: 2-15100--2-15199, National Archives; for the Chinese perspective on the buildup in Manchuria, see Chen Jian, *The Sino-Soviet Alliance and China's Entry into the Korean War* (Washington, D.C.: Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, June 1992); Sergei N. Goncharov, John W. Lewis,

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