

Chinese military conducts long-range missile tests

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China tested four nuclear capable missiles in July and August as part of a program to upgrade and expand its nuclear arsenal. The tests took place amid growing tensions in the Pacific as a result of the Obama administration's efforts to encircle China diplomatically and militarily. The US military build-up, especially its planned anti-ballistic missile shield in Asia, is provoking an arms race as China seeks to ensure that its military capacity remains effective.

The Chinese Second Artillery Corps is reported to have tested a new DF-41 nuclear-capable missile on July 24 in western China. According to the *Global Times*, the purpose was to test multiple independently targetable re-entry vehicle (MIRV) technology. This technology would allow the Chinese military to place a larger number of nuclear warheads on each missile, making them a more destructive weapon.

The DF-41 is the latest long-range Inter Continental Ballistic Missile (ICBM) to be deployed by the Chinese military. It is designed to operate from mobile land-based trucks, making the missile harder to detect and destroy in a "first strike." The DF-41 could reach targets across the US. At present, most nuclear missiles in China's arsenal can only hit targets in the eastern Pacific, Eurasia and the US west coast.

The Second Artillery Corps also tested a DF-5 silo-based ICBM on August 20 and another road-based DF-31A missile on August 30.

In addition, China reportedly tested a new submarine-launched ballistic missile (SLBM)—the JL-2—on August 16. Once operational, this would provide the Chinese Navy with its first effective submarine-launched

nuclear missile, which is also difficult to detect. The submarines could be dispatched closer to targets in the US, giving China another "second-strike" response to a nuclear "first-strike."

The development of more sophisticated missiles clearly reflects concerns in the Chinese military that it is vulnerable to a "first strike" by the US that would wipe out China's land-based missiles, preventing any retaliation. The establishment of a US ballistic missile shield in Asia, which would knock out any remaining Chinese missiles, only heightens these fears.

Commenting to the *New York Times*, Sun Zhe, a professor of international relations at Beijing's Tsinghua University, said: "We have again and again said that we will not be the first country to use nuclear force... We need to be able to defend ourselves, and our main threat, I'm afraid, comes from the United States." Unlike China, the US has not renounced the "first strike" use of nuclear weapons.

All the recently-tested missiles are designed to be difficult to detect, so as to avoid destruction in the event of attack. MIRV technology would also give the Chinese nuclear force a greater capacity to retaliate, as missiles could be loaded with multiple warheads, as well as decoys, to confuse defensive systems.

Hans M. Kristensen, director of the Nuclear Information Project at the Federation of American Scientists, noted: "One of the factors that has the potential to trigger such a decision [to develop MIRVs] would be a U.S. missile defence system that, combined with advanced conventional strike capabilities, could weaken Chinese leaders' confidence in the reliability

of their retaliatory nuclear force.”

China’s military arsenal is currently far smaller and more vulnerable than either America’s or Russia’s. The Pentagon estimates that China currently possesses 55-65 ICBMs and two submarines carrying 12 missiles each. The Federation of American Scientists assessed that in 2011 Russia had 322 ICBMs with 1,090 warheads and 144 SLBMs with 528 warheads.

By contrast, the federation estimated that the US possessed 448 ICBMs with 500 warheads and 249 SLBMs with 1,200 warheads. It also estimated that in 2011, China had 140 land-based nuclear missiles with a single warhead each and no operational SLBMs. Both the US and Russia maintain many nuclear-armed strategic bombers as well.

China is also well behind on nuclear weapons technology. MIRVs, for example, have been in service with the US and Russia since the 1970s. China is seeking to catch up in other areas of military technology too. It has begun developing advanced warplanes, such as the J-20 stealth fighter, and a new aircraft carrier.

The US administration and military constantly call attention to the size of the Chinese military budget of \$100 billion to heighten fears of China. But the responsibility for this dangerous arms build-up rests with the US—with its massive defence budget of \$700 billion. The Obama administration has been expanding its air and naval presence in Asia, as well as forging closer alliances and strategic partnerships throughout the region. It is hardly surprising that the Chinese regime has reacted, heightening the risk of a slide toward a nuclear catastrophe.



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