

U.S. Intelligence Eyes Chinese Research into Space-Age Weapons

Declassified Documents: Half Century of U.S. Spying on China

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Possible Use of Electromagnetic and Microwave Radiation against Taiwan or U.S. Fleet Raised

[Declassified Documents Are Part of Major New Collection on a Half Century of U.S. Spying on China](#)

Other Highlights of the Collection Include:

References to Cyber-Warfare

Dangers of Building Nuclear Plants in Japan (Fukushima Plant an Example)

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The complete set is available at <http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB351/>

Washington, D.C., July 21, 2011 – In 2005, U.S. intelligence agencies monitoring Chinese research into high-power microwave (HPM) and electromagnetic pulse (EMP) radiation speculated that Beijing might be trying to develop a capability to incapacitate Taiwan electronically without triggering a U.S. nuclear retaliation, according to documents published in a major new National Security Archive collection.



Figure 5. The FUKUSHIMA Nuclear Power Station, showing No. 1, 2, 3, and 4 BWR (U)

Image of the Fukushima Nuclear Power Station from a 1974 Defense Intelligence Agency report (Document 7)

In recent years, China's development of an assortment of conventional and nuclear weapons has regularly attracted the interest and concern of U.S. policy-makers, intelligence officials, and China watchers. So has Beijing's interest in less conventional means of conflict, including cyber-warfare - with Chinese hackers recently linked to or suspected in a number of incidents, notably breaking into highly sensitive U.S. government computer systems (see CBSNews.com, for example).

But cyber-warfare is only one of a number of unconventional approaches to warfare that China has investigated. A declassified [2005 report](#) from the U.S. National Ground Intelligence Center describing Chinese experiments using HPM and EMP on animals concluded that the real objective was to determine the effects of that radiation on humans. Analysts did not believe the experiments, which produced "high mortality rates" among the animal subjects, were aimed at developing "antipersonnel" weapons, but they did describe a hypothetical "Taiwan Scenario" in which a lower altitude EMP burst would damage electronics on the island without causing enough human casualties, "either Taiwan[ese] or U.S. military," to trigger "a U.S. nuclear response."

Other recently declassified materials describe similar military concerns. A [U.S. defense intelligence document](#) from 2001, for example, details Chinese plans for developing radiofrequency weapons (although it stops short of speculating on their possible purpose). Still others [reflect on issues of current interest](#), for example the risks of constructing nuclear power plants - like the [Fukushima facility](#) that exploded after the recent tsunami - at questionable sites in Japan.

These and 2,300 other records are part of a new National Security Archive publication, *U.S. Intelligence and China: Collection, Analysis and Covert Action*, the latest addition to the ["Digital National Security Archive"](#) series published through ProQuest Information and Learning. A sampling of materials in this important new collection is posted below.

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The scope of the *U.S. Intelligence and China* set covers both the People's Republic and Taiwan, from 1945-2010. As the materials demonstrate, even before the formation of the PRC in October 1949, the United States targeted China for intelligence collection, hoping to

uncover secrets about everything from Communist military capabilities to domestic policies. The resulting intelligence was not only critical in helping to shape U.S. policy toward the emerging world power, it was also used to guide sensitive covert action operations by the U.S. and Taiwan in the 1950s and 1960s aimed at weakening the Communist regime's hold on the mainland.

Even the Nationalist regime on Taiwan – a U.S. ally and a collaborator against China – was a target of U.S. intelligence collection efforts. Against both targets, the United States used a variety of methods, including human sources, signals intelligence, overhead imagery, and other lesser-known techniques.

For years, the results of most of these multifaceted collection efforts against both Mao's China and Chiang Kai-Shek's Nationalist forces were kept highly classified. Now, thanks to the work of two widely recognized intelligence experts – Jeffrey Richelson and Matthew Aid – these important historical records are now available to the public, providing new insights into all aspects of the United States' intelligence operations against its rival, the People's Republic, and its ally, Taiwan.

The collection includes new materials from a full array of intelligence entities inside the U.S. government that shed light not only on U.S. intelligence activities but on substantive topics relating to the PRC and Taiwan as well:

Foreign policy

Military capabilities and intentions

Domestic/regime politics and internal conditions

Science, technology, and industry

Economic conditions

More specifically, the set includes:

Estimates and studies of the PRC's foreign and defense policies, strategic power, scientific and industrial capabilities, and domestic affairs

Biographical information on Chinese military and civilian leaders

Studies of the possibility of a PRC-Taiwan clash (whether over islands in the Taiwan Straits or Taiwan itself)

Materials discussing Taiwan's production of conventional arms, and its occasional quest to develop nuclear weapons

Documents

The National Security Archive's *China Intelligence* document set contains a wide variety of materials on diverse topics and originating from all corners of the U.S. intelligence community. The following samples reflect some of this variety:

[1\) "Disruption to Shipping in the China Trade Major Problem to Peiping," in CIA, Office of Current Intelligence, Current Intelligence Review, August 19, 1954, Top Secret Froth, CREST Collection, Document No. CIA-RDP61S00527A000200010070-8, NA, CP. Pages: 2](#)

Early in 1953, President Eisenhower lifted the blockade of Communist China which was subsequently reinitiated by the naval forces of Nationalist China. In the early days of the First Taiwan Straits Crisis the Central Intelligence Agency produced this report that highlighted the economic and political impact of the blockade on Communist China. The report claims increased economic strife and political isolation as a result of limited alternatives (floods washing-out north-south railroads), embarrassing set-backs (seizure of the Polish tanker *Tuapse*), and the curtailed ability of Eastern European allies to lend assistance.

[2\) Memorandum, Smith to Director, Effect on the Chinese Nationalists of a US Refusal to Permit an Attack on the Chinese Mainland, June 21, 1962, Secret, CREST Collection, Document No. CIA-RDP79R00904A000800030018-4, NA, CP. Pages: 3](#)

Following the Taiwan Straits crises of the 1950s, avoiding a war between the two Chinas by ensuring a stable status quo became a U.S. priority. Knowing the desire of Nationalist China to reclaim the mainland, the Central Intelligence Agency analyzed the likely response to U.S. attempts to secure the current stability. This memorandum highlights probable responses which range from a chilling effect on U.S.-Taiwan relations, a unilateral Nationalist Chinese invasion of mainland China, and a turnover in the government in Taiwan.

[3\) Airgram, CA-7647, Department of State to Hong Kong, Health and Behavior of Mao Tse-tung, February 3, 1964, Secret, RG-59, Subject-Numeric Files 1964-1966, POL 15-1 CHICOM, NA, CP. Pages: 1](#)

The Department of State, in an effort to glean human intelligence about the Chinese leadership, forwarded this list of questions to be posed to visitors to China. Specifically, those who came in contact with Mao Tse-tung were to be asked about the specifics of their interactions and any "peculiar physical characteristics" displayed by Mao.

[4\) Joint Atomic Intelligence Committee, Memorandum for the Record, Reporting of the Chinese Nuclear Test on 16 October 1964, October 16, 1964, Secret, CIA FOIA. Pages: 1](#)

On October 16, 1964, the People's Republic of China tested its first nuclear weapon at the Lop Nur site in western China. Communist China became the fifth nation to test a nuclear weapon. Though heavily redacted, this Joint Atomic Intelligence Committee memorandum reports the test and notes the preparation of a public statement for National Security Advisor McGeorge Bundy.

[5\) CIA, Intelligence Information Cable, Presence of Chinese Communist Troops in North Vietnam in October 1965, February 18, 1967, classification markings not declassified, CIA FOIA. Pages: 5](#)

Though Communist China was not a major combatant in the U.S. war in Vietnam, the PRC did send anti-aircraft and engineering units into North Vietnam in the 1960s to defend and repair transportation infrastructure. The U.S. intelligence community showed great interest in Chinese involvement and this detailed intelligence cable reveals the activities of Chinese anti-aircraft units stationed in North Vietnam. Strangely, the anti-aircraft units were

furnished with small arms, but none of the heavy weapons required to deter airstrikes.

[6\) Bureau of Intelligence and Research, Intelligence Note, Denney to Secretary, USSR/China: Soviet and Chinese Forces Clash on the Ussuri River, March 4, 1969, Secret, RG-59, Subject-Numeric Files 1967-1969, Box 1969, POL 32-1 Chicom-USSR, NA, CP. Pages: 6](#)

The ideological Sino-Soviet divide widened in the 1960s and led to a number of border skirmishes, one of which is detailed in this Department of State Bureau of Intelligence and Research intelligence note. In addition to discussing the events that transpired on March 2, 1969, this document discusses some of the broader issues at play in the Sino-Soviet dispute at the time. Manchuria was already heavily militarized by China at the time and the Soviet Union had begun a large troop build-up years earlier. Chinese grievances at the terms of the border treaty and extensive propaganda campaigns against the Soviet Union are discussed alongside an analysis that neither side was interested in provoking a war. A map of the disputed area is also included which highlights the location of the skirmish.

[7\) Defense Intelligence Agency, Directorate for Scientific and Technical Agency, Defense Intelligence Report, ST-CS-02-398-74, Nuclear Energy Programs: Japan and Taiwan, September 3, 1974, Secret, Pages: 47](#)

Attempting to curb the spread of nuclear weapons and related technology, the U.S. conducted espionage on its allies in Japan and Taiwan. Though heavily redacted in parts, this document reveals an interesting discussion about the expulsion of the Taiwanese representative from the International Atomic Energy Agency. The report admits that the Taiwanese government could easily bar inspections at its nuclear sites, but allows IAEA teams continued access to facilities. Another interesting portion of the report discusses the potential problems with the siting of nuclear energy reactors in Japan (pages 22, 26-27). In fact, the Fukushima nuclear power complex is pictured in the section dealing with the related issues faced by the Japanese government at the time.

[8\) Defense Intelligence Agency, Biographic Sketch, Deng Xiaoping, February 1979, NOFORN, DIA FOIA, Pages: 5](#)

Intelligence on the Chinese leadership often helped guide and inform diplomatic interactions and even broader U.S. strategy towards Communist China. This biographic sketch of Vice Chairman Deng Xiaoping produced by the Defense Intelligence Agency shows the breadth of information collected. Included in the sketch are Deng's politics, educational background, military service, family, and personality ("energetic," "abrasive, arrogant").

[9\) Cable, 230716Z OCT 79, AIT TAIPEI to AIT WASHDC, Post-Normalization Taiwan, October 23, 1979, classification markings redacted, Department of State FOIA. Pages: 15](#)

The normalization of relations between the U.S. and People's Republic of China presented a new challenge to Taiwan and its relationship with the U.S. This cable from the American Institute in Taiwan highlights the impact of normalization on the political power structure in Taiwan. President Chiang Ching-kuo is the locus of the discussion - his governing style, political opposition, and relationship with key institutions: the security apparatus, the armed forces, the party, the technocratic bureaucracy, and the private business community.

[10\) National Ground Intelligence Center, Assessment of Chinese Radiofrequency Weapon](#)

[Capabilities, April 2001, Secret, Pages: 18](#)

This report from the National Ground Intelligence Center is a more technical document as a great deal of time is spent discussing the technology behind radiofrequency weapons. The key determination of this report is that the Chinese have not deployed radiofrequency weapons; however, significant research and development is being conducted on high-power radiofrequency technology that could quickly evolve into a weapons system. In particular, the Chinese are reported to be working on radiofrequency technology designed to disable computer systems and disarm mines. Additionally, the Chinese military has shown interest in radiofrequency weapons for use in anti-aircraft and anti-satellite operations.

[11\) National Ground Intelligence Center, China: Medical Research on Bio-Effects of Electromagnetic Pulse and High-Power Microwave Radiation, August 17, 2005, Secret, Pages: 8](#)

In January 2004, Chinese medical researchers presented research into the biological effects of high-intensity radiation at a public conference in Thailand. Their briefings, despite the basis on animal experiments, revealed great interest in the potential ramifications of human exposure to Electromagnetic Pulse and High-Power Microwave radiation. The report goes on to speculate as to what the implication of this research is on the trajectory and progress of Chinese efforts into developing radiation weapons. Included in the discussion are electromagnetic pulse weapons derived from nuclear and non-nuclear explosions and carbon/graphite-fiber bombs. The speculation largely revolves around the potential impact of such weapons systems in a "Taiwan Scenario" and potential deployment strategies that would minimize the risk of U.S. involvement or prevent nuclear retaliation if a conflict with the U.S. did arise.

[12\) Report, Department of Defense, Office of the Secretary of Defense, Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China, 2010, Unclassified, Pages: 83](#)

In 2000, as part of the National Defense Authorization Act, Congress required the Department of Defense to write an annual report assessing the military capabilities, doctrine, strategies and operational concepts of the People's Republic of China. The 2010 edition of the report presented here discusses military modernization, the Taiwan situation, and bilateral contacts with the U.S. military. A brief section on page 16 details Chinese cyberwarfare developments including reports of computer systems (including U.S. government networks) being targeted by cyberattacks seeking to exfiltrate information of strategic or military value. The brevity and absence of detail could indicate a lack of concrete data: "unclear if these intrusions were conducted by [...] the PRC government" - or a topic of heightened, thus closely guarded, concern for the Department of Defense: "developing capabilities for cyberwarfare is consistent with authoritative PLA [People's Liberation Army] military writings."

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