

China Just Practiced Launching a Nuclear Weapon



But don't freak out just yet.

The Chinese military successfully tested a mock launch of a nuclear-armed intercontinental ballistic missile, state media reported on Jan. 21, 2019.

At the same time, experts stressed that China would never be the first country to launch a nuclear attack.

"The People's Liberation Army Rocket Force conducted a simulated intercontinental ballistic missile strike mission from an underground bunker against an imaginary enemy," *Global Times* reported, citing China Central Television.

The report didn't specify the time or location of the launch or the type of missile involved.

But the exercise underscored Beijing's main approach to nuclear deterrence. Mount ICBMs on mobile launchers and hide them underground. "China's strategic missiles are usually placed in deep, protective bunkers," *Global Times* paraphrased military expert Song Zhongping as saying.

Crew must endure underground living in crowded, stressful conditions. "Long-term survival training in closed environments has become routine for the troops to ensure counterattack capability in case a war breaks out," *Global Times* explained.

The People's Liberation Army Rocket Force, or PLARF, is getting new and better missiles with better multiple-independent-reentry-vehicle warheads, or MIRVs, according to a January 2019 report from the U.S. Defense Intelligence Agency.

"The PLARF ... continues to enhance its nuclear deterrent, maintaining silo-based nuclear ICBMs and adding more survivable, mobile nuclear delivery systems," the DIA explained.

“China currently has 75 to 100 ICBMs, including the silo-based CSS-4 Mod 2/DF-5A and MIRV-equipped CSS-4 Mod 3/DF-5B; the solid-fueled, road-mobile CSS-10 Mod 1/DF-31 and CSS-10 Mod 2/ DF-31A; and the shorter range CSS-3/DF-4.”

“The CSS-10 Mod 2/DF-31A has a range of more than 11,200 kilometers [6,960 miles] and can reach most locations within the continental United States. China also is developing a new MIRV-capable road-mobile ICBM, the CSS-X-10/DF-41.”

Song told *Global Times* the new DF-41 might appear in public for the first time during the October 2019 celebrations marking the 70 anniversary of the founding of the People’s Republic of China.

In addition to land-based missiles, China also deploys nuclear warheads on at least four Type 094 submarines. The Chinese air force is developing a nuclear-capable stealth bomber.

But China’s nuclear arsenal is small compared to America’s and Russia’s own arsenals. Beijing maintains 280 nuclear warheads on ICBMs, medium-range rockets and submarine-launched missiles. The United States possesses 3,800 nukes and deploys 1,750 of them. Russia has 4,350 warheads and deploys 1,600.

The United States and Russia risk a nuclear arms race between them. Between withdrawing various treaties and developing new, seemingly more useable smaller nukes and deterrence-undermining missile-defenses, Washington and Moscow might seem determined to make the world less safe.

U.S. president Donald Trump’s 2018 nuclear-weapons review broadened America’s atomic rules of engagement. Before, it was U.S. policy that only a nuclear sneak attack or some other existential threat would justify a retaliatory atomic strike from the United States.

By contrast, Trump’s nuclear review warned that a major hacking event or an online assault on U.S. financial infrastructure could warrant a nuclear counterattack.

Combined with looser policy, Trump’s own recklessness could elevate the likelihood of atomic war. “The risk is that he will be quicker to order their use in a confrontation with Russia, China, North Korea or Iran and that the conflict will

escalate to all-out nuclear war,” Bruce Blair, a nuclear expert at Princeton University, told *The National Interest* .

Beijing, on the other hand, has urged restraint and reaffirmed its commitment to a “no-first-use” policy. “As China promises never to use nuclear weapon first and will only use them in a counterattack, China’s strategic missile storage facilities must be able to survive the first wave of hostile nuclear strike,” *Global Times* paraphrased Song as saying.

“Without a first strike against China, China will never use the weapons,” *Global Times* stressed. “An ICBM loaded with nuclear warheads will likely never be used as it would precipitate an all-out nuclear war, say analysts. The weapon’s primary purpose is deterrence, and to facilitate political and diplomatic discussions.”

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Image: Reuters.

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