

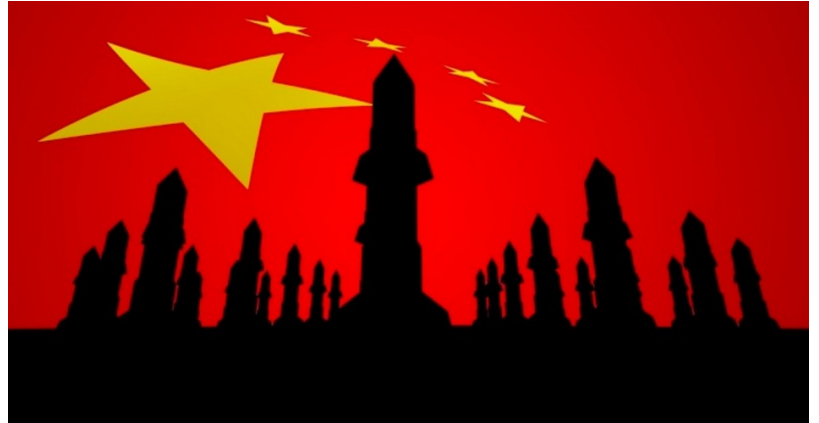


Written by [Charles Scaliger](#) on April 2, 2016

China Close to Deploying Formidable New Nuclear Missile

Quickly and quietly, the People's Republic of China is transforming itself into a 21st Century military superpower to be reckoned with. Case in point: China's latest-generation Dong Feng ("East Wind") intercontinental ballistic missile, the DF-41, is [months away](#) from deployment.

This newest nuclear missile, touted as the world's longest-range missile, is reputedly capable of striking anywhere within the continental United States. Unlike its predecessors, the DF-41 will not be confined to stationary missile silos, but will be launched from mobile platforms. This formidable new weapon will probably be deployed to the People's Liberation's Army's (PLA's) Strategic Rocket Forces bases this year, "given the number of real reported tests," says Richard Fisher of the International Assessment and Strategy Center.



The DF-41 is the full "MIRV" nuclear package, carrying 10 independently targetable warheads. With a maximum range of around 9,000 miles, it will be capable of traveling well in excess of Mach 5, reaching the continental United States over the North Pole within a half-hour, or traversing the Pacific Ocean to North American targets in a few minutes more than that.

The trajectory of Communist China's nuclear program is worth reviewing. China detonated its first nuclear bomb — a fission device — in 1964, and its first hydrogen bomb three years later. But for decades thereafter, they posed little threat to the United States because — unlike the Soviets — they were unable to develop delivery vehicles with enough range or reliability to reach U.S. shores. This was in part because the distance from China to the continental United States is much greater than between Russia and here. The Soviets had only to launch across the North Pole along a relatively short route to reach America, or penetrate American airspace using long-range bombers operating from the Soviet Far East (mastery of submarine-launched missile technology came later). For China, however, a missile launched on the polar route has to traverse thousands of additional miles across the vastness of Siberia, or further still to cross the Pacific en route to the West Coast.

As late as the early 1990s, the Chinese had a modest stockpile of old-fashioned bombs, but no real ICBMs. But all of that changed with stunning rapidity during the Clinton years, when, during the scandal that became known as Chinagate, Bill Clinton allowed the export of missile technology to the Chinese in exchange for campaign contributions. By the end of the '90s, probably thanks to help from U.S. missile technology, the Chinese had deployed the first missiles capable of striking the western United States. Over the next decade and a half, they have advanced rapidly, to the point where, by the



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end of this year in all probability, the entire United States will be in the Chinese nuclear crosshairs.

That this has come about in a time of increased military tension between China and the United States over the Spratly Islands in the South China Sea should be genuinely alarming. But the attitude of many observers is dismissive, claiming that U.S. anti-missile assets in Guam could easily shoot down any Chinese ICBM soon after launch, and that U.S. military technology is so far ahead of China's that the latter has no realistic chance of catching up.

But such blithe reassurances ignore the lessons of the Cold War, during which the West helped to build up the Soviet threat to cow Americans into accepting more international government. The same is likely to be true of the Chinese dragon, if its formidability continues to grow. What is less clear is whether China will be as controllable an asset as the Soviets.



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