

**Chinese military**

## China plans to quadruple nuclear weapons stockpile, Pentagon says

Forecast of 1,000 warheads by 2030 is sharp increase in estimates and 'game-changer' for Sino-US relations



Chinese intercontinental strategic nuclear missiles at a military parade in Beijing © Tao Liang/Xinhua/Alamy

**Demetri Sevastopulo** in Washington YESTERDAY

---

China plans to quadruple its nuclear stockpile by 2030, according to a Pentagon assessment that points to a shift in Chinese policy with big implications for the balance of military power.

The US defence department said China could have 700 deliverable nuclear warheads by 2027 and would boost its stockpile — currently estimated in the low 200s — to at least 1,000 warheads by the end of the decade. The US has 3,800 warheads, according to the [Nuclear Information Project](#) at the Federation of American Scientists.

The projection marked a dramatic increase from last year's estimate when the Pentagon said China was on course to double its stockpile.

“If this was an emoji, it would be the ‘eyes popping’ emoji,” said Caitlin Talmadge, an expert on Chinese nuclear weapons at Georgetown University.

The Pentagon's latest [China military power report](#), released on Wednesday, said Beijing was “expanding the number of land, sea, and air-based nuclear delivery platforms and constructing the infrastructure necessary to support this major expansion of its nuclear forces”.

The warning comes weeks after the Financial Times [reported China had tested](#) a nuclear-capable hypersonic weapon that General Mark Milley, chairman of the US

concerns about the possibility of war over Taiwan. Some US military planners and experts are concerned that China is expanding its nuclear forces to limit American options in the case of conflict.

The Pentagon said the Chinese military was working towards improving certain capabilities by 2027 that would “provide Beijing with more credible military options in a Taiwan contingency”.

Admiral Philip Davidson, then head of US Indo-Pacific command, in March said China could take military action against Taiwan by 2027, although other experts are more sceptical.

Speaking at the Aspen Security Forum on Wednesday, Milley said he did not think China would take military action towards Taiwan in the “near future” — meaning over the next two years — but warned that Beijing was developing the capability.

“The Chinese are clearly and unambiguously building the capability to provide those options,” he said. “But near future? Probably not. But anything can happen.”

Talmadge said the Chinese developments had implications for a conflict over Taiwan because it would make the US less likely to use nuclear weapons.

“The US and China are becoming more entrenched in a nuclear stalemate, a state of mutual vulnerability where neither side can protect its homeland from nuclear attack even if it strikes first,” she said.

Evan Medeiros, a former top White House Asia adviser now at Georgetown University, said the revelations in the Pentagon report signalled a “new and much more challenging type of cold war”.

“This is a historic game-changer for US-China ties, by accelerating competition and accentuating distrust,” said Medeiros. “This development demands that arms control be on the agenda when President Joe Biden and Chinese president Xi Jinping hold a virtual summit later this year.”

The Pentagon said China was boosting its capacity to produce and separate plutonium, which Talmadge said was a “big deal” because this had been viewed as one of the constraints on China accelerating development of nuclear warheads, which require fissile material.

developed a nuclear capable air-launched ballistic missile along with its land-based and sea-based nuclear arms. It also confirmed that China was building hundreds of missile silos to house intercontinental ballistic missiles and was “on the cusp of a large silo-based ICBM force expansion comparable to those undertaken by other major powers”.

The Chinese advancements raise new questions about whether China is moving away from its longstanding nuclear “minimum deterrence” policy, which is designed to ensure it has the capability to respond to a first strike. Some China military experts have also expressed concern that Beijing might abandon its policy of “no first use” of nuclear weapons.

The Pentagon report said the People’s Liberation Army had started implementing an “early warning counterstrike” posture, which would make it much easier to strike back before an incoming US missile hit its target in China.

Andrew Erickson, a US Naval War College PLA expert, said the report underscored “China’s meteoric military rise” and raised serious concerns about the security of Taiwan.

“Beijing is preparing to attempt to deter or defeat American defence of Taiwan in coming years by claiming a potent weapon for every possible scenario contingency and escalation,” Erickson said.

Follow [Demetri Sevastopulo](#) on Twitter

