

Table 1. Chinese nuclear forces, 2024.*

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Type	NATO designation	Number of launchers ^a	Year deployed	Range (kilometers)	Warheads x yield ^b (kilotons)	Warheads
Land-based ballistic missiles^c						
<i>Medium/Intermediate-Range</i>						
DF-21A/E	CSS-5 Mods 2, 6	..	2000, 2016	2,100+ ^d	1 × 200–300	.. ^e
DF-26	CSS-18	216 ^f	2016	4,000	1 × 200–300	108 ^g
<i>Subtotal:</i>		216				108
<i>Intercontinental Range</i>						
DF-5A	CSS-4 Mod 2	6	1981	12,000	1 × 4,000–5,000	6
DF-5B	CSS-4 Mod 3	12	2015	13,000	Up to 5 × 200–300	60
DF-5C	(CSS-4 Mod 4)	..	(2024)	13,000	1 × multi-MT	..
DF-27	CSS-X-24	..	(2026)	5,000–8,000	1 × 200–300	..
DF-31	CSS-10 Mod 1	..	2006	7,200	1 × 200–300	.. ^h
DF-31A	CSS-10 Mod 2	24	2007	11,200	1 × 200–300	24
DF-31A	CSS-10 (silo)	..	(2023)	11,200	1 × 200–300	..
DF-31AG	CSS-10 Mod 2 ⁱ	64 ^j	2018	11,200	1 × 200–300	64
DF-41	CSS-20 (mobile)	28	2020	12,000	Up to 3 × 200–300	84
DF-41	CSS-20 (silo)	..	(2025)	12,000	(Up to 3 × 200–300)	..
<i>Subtotal:</i>		134				238
<i>Total land-based</i>		350				346
Submarine-launched ballistic missiles						
JL-2	CSS-N-14	0 ^k	2016	7,000+	1 × 200–300	0
JL-3	CSS-N-20	6/72	2022 ^l	9,000+	(“Multiple”)	72
Aircraft^m						
H-6K	B-6	10	1965/2009	3,100+	1 × bomb	10 ⁿ
H-6N	B-6	10	2020	3,100+	1 × ALBM	10
H-20	?	..	(2030)	?	(bomb/ALCM?)	..
Total fielded		442				438
Other produced warheads						[62] ^o
TOTAL						500

*This table is based on U.S. government reports, work by non-governmental experts such as Decker Eveleth, Ben Reuter, and others who wish to remain anonymous, as well as the authors' estimates.

^aTwo dots (..) imply the number is unknown or premature. Numbers between parentheses indicate weapons in the process of entering service but not yet operational.

^bThe Chinese nuclear testing program demonstrated a wide range of warhead yields. While older and less accurate missiles were equipped with megaton-yield warheads, new and more accurate missiles carry warheads with much lower yields, possibly in the few hundreds of kilotons. It is possible that some warheads have even lower yield options.

^cAlthough the DF-17 MRBM was previously claimed to possibly be dual-capable, this has not been substantiated and the 2023 US Department of Defense's report describes it as conventional. As a result, the DF-17 is no longer included in this table.

^dUS Department of Defense (DOD) lists the range of the DF-21A/E as 1,750 km, but the US Air Force has reported it as 2,150 km.

^eThe nuclear DF-21 is no longer mentioned in the 2023 DOD report and may have been retired.

^fUS Department of Defense lists 250 IRBM launchers, up from 200 in 2021, which is more than the known visible base infrastructure indicates. The DOD number may include launchers for bases that are upgrading to DF-26 but not yet fully operational as well as launchers in the final stage of production.

^gIf all deployed DF-26 launchers are assigned one nuclear warhead each, the total stockpile would include nearly 550 warheads, which is more than DOD lists. Moreover, that would mean each DF-26 brigade base was assigned several dozen warheads, which seems excessive. This table assumes that only half of the dual-capable DF-26 launchers are assigned a nuclear mission, but the actual number is unknown.

^hThe DF-31 is no longer listed in the annual DOD report and is thought to have been retired.

ⁱThe DF-31AG is thought to carry the same missile as the DF-31A.

^jAssumes possibly six brigades are operational with the DF-31AG.

^kIn November 2022, the commander of the US Pacific Fleet stated that China had replaced all of its deployed JL-2 SLBMs with JL-3s. The 2023 DOD report, however, describes the SSBNs as upgrading to the JL-3.

^lAlthough US officials have stated that the JL-3 has become operational on Type 094/A SSBNs, it is also thought to be intended to eventually arm the future Type 096 SSBN.

^mBombers were used to conduct at least 12 of China's nuclear test explosions between 1965 and 1979 and gravity bomb models are displayed in museums. The People's Liberation Army Air Force nuclear capability was dormant for years, but the mission has recently been reestablished.

ⁿAlthough the US Department of Defense lists only the H-6N as nuclear with an air-launched ballistic missile, we estimate a small number of gravity bombs were possibly retained in the stockpile for earlier versions. With the arrival of the ALBMs, however, those bombs will probably be retired, if it hasn't happened already.

^oIn addition to the 438 warheads assigned to operational forces, China probably has produced, or is producing, dozens of warheads for additional launchers, including those needed to arm its hundreds of new missile silos. DOD reported in 2023 that the Chinese stockpile as of May 2023 included over 500 warheads, which appears to include warheads for more than the observable force, such as new silo-based ICBMs.

appears to simply apply the same growth rate of new warheads added to the stockpile between 2019 and 2021 to the subsequent years until 2035. We assess

that this projected growth trajectory is feasible but depends significantly upon answers to the above questions (Figure 1).