

Table 1. Chinese nuclear forces, 2026.

Type	NATO designation	Number of launchers ^a	Year deployed	Range (kilometers)	Warheads x yield ^b (kilotons)	Warheads
Land-based ballistic missiles						
<i>Intermediate-range</i>						
DF-26	CSS-18	300 ^c	2016	4,000	1 × 425	100 ^d
<i>Subtotal:</i>		300				100
<i>Intercontinental range</i>						
DF-5A	CSS-4 Mod 2	6	1981	12,000	1 × 4.5 MT	6
DF-5B	CSS-4 Mod 3	12	2015	13,000	Up to 5 × 425	60
DF-5C	(CSS-4 Mod 4)	5	(2025)	13,000	1 × “multi-MT”	5
DF-31A/AG	CSS-10 Mod 2 ^e	104	2007/2018	11,200	1 × 425	104
DF-31B	(CSS-10 Mod 3)	320	2023	12,000	1 × 425	150 ^f
DF-41	CSS-20 (mobile)	28	2020	12,000	Up to 3 × 425	84
DF-61	CSS-? (mobile)	?	(2025)	12,000	?	?
<i>Subtotal:</i>		475				409
<i>Total land-based</i>		775				509
Submarine-launched ballistic missiles						
JL-2	CSS-N-14	0 ^g	2016	7,000+	1 × 700	0
JL-3	CSS-N-20	6/72	2022 ^h	9,000+	1 × 425	72
Aircraftⁱ						
H-6N	B-6	20	2020	3,100+	2 × ALBM	20
H-20	?	.	(2030)	?	(ALCM?)	.
Subtotal		867				601
Warheads produced for incoming delivery systems						19 ^j
Total						620^k

Abbreviations used: ALBM: air-launched ballistic missile; ALCM: air-launched cruise missile; DF: Dong Feng (“East Wind”); DOD: US Department of Defense; IRBM: intermediate-range ballistic missile; JL: Ju Lang (“Giant Wave”); H: Hong (“Bang”); MRBM: medium-range ballistic missile; MT: megaton; SLBM: submarine-launched ballistic missiles; SSBN: nuclear-powered ballistic missile submarine; TEL: transporter erector launcher.

Notes: Two dots (.) imply the number is unknown or premature.

^aNumbers 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, newer long-range missile warheads probably mainly have yields of several hundred kilotons, and a smaller number have multi-megaton warheads. It is possible that some warheads assigned to forces aimed at regional deterrence have even lower yield options. Updated yield estimates from Zhang (2025).

^cUS Department of Defense lists 300 IRBM launchers in 2025, 50 more than the previous year’s estimate. The DOD number may include launchers for bases that are nearing completion or upgrading to DF-26.

^dThis table assumes roughly one-third of the DF-26 TELs have a nuclear mission. More DF-26 may be in production for more bases.

^eThe US Department of Defense refers to both the DF-31A and the DF-31AG by the same designation—CSS-10 Mod 2—suggesting that they carry the same missile.

^fChina is thought to have produced around half of the warheads that will eventually be assigned to its silo-based DF-31B intercontinental ballistic missiles.

^gIn 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 2024 DOD report, however, describes the SSBNs as upgrading to the JL-3. We assess that by mid-2026, this update had been completed.

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

ⁱBombers 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.

^jIn addition to the 601 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.

^kMost of China’s warheads are not thought to be deployed on launchers under normal circumstances but kept in storage facilities. However, intelligence reports from the United States claim that some of China’s land-based missiles are in a state of heightened operational readiness during exercises. Moreover, US government officials privately suggest that SSBNs conducting deterrence patrols might be carrying nuclear-armed missiles. Partly based on these assumptions, we assess that a small number of China’s missiles might be equipped with nuclear warheads (c. 34 warheads as of Jan. 2026), but this assessment comes with considerable uncertainty.