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Citation Assignment

Parentheticals

LBJ and China

US policy toward China evolved during the administration of President Lyndon Johnson. In 1964, the administration contemplated preemptive military strikes against Chinese nuclear facilities. China had been working on a nuclear weapon since 1955 and US intelligence believed that this program might produce a working nuclear bomb in late 1964 (Goldstein, 2003, p. 741). The administration decided against military action, even after China detonated its first atomic weapon in October 1964. Though President Kennedy believed that Chinese nuclear capability might shift the balance of power in Asia, President Johnson thought that the US should only attack Chinese nuclear sites if the US and China became involved in direct hostilities in the Vietnam War (Goldstein, 2003, pp. 741-746). A Chinese nuclear capability was a serious issue, but it was seen as a development that did not require major changes in US policy in Asia (Dulles, 1972, pp. 222-223). China’s growing power and the increasing intensity of the Soviet-Chinese rivalry seem to have convinced the US that changing China’s aggressive behavior required engagement rather than isolation (Dulles, 1972, pp. 228-234). In a conversation with American journalists on December 19, 1967, Johnson sent a clear message to China that if it stopped its support for revolutionary movements around Asia, the US would welcome a normalization of US-Chinese relations (Johnson, 1967). In particular, Johnson hoped China would end its assistance to Vietnam (Johnson, 1967).