

China's Been Caught Arming America's Enemies for 20 Years

A new Congressional Research Service report confirms that Chinese companies have continued supplying nuclear weapons and missile-related systems to Russia, North Korea, and Iran, despite more than two decades of U.S. warnings and a growing trail of sanctions.

The May 19 CRS report found that while the Chinese government halted direct, state-sponsored nuclear transfers, "Chinese entities have continued to engage in proliferation," citing persistent weaknesses in China's export control enforcement. The U.S. government has raised these concerns repeatedly with Beijing, the report noted.

"When that continues to be the case over 20 years ... over time it becomes a choice," said Vann Van Diepen, former Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Nonproliferation and Disarmament, quoted in the report.

The State Department said in April that Chinese companies remain a major source of equipment, goods, and technology for Iran's ballistic missile program. Iran's capabilities have been sharply degraded by recent U.S. military operations, but the Chinese supply pipeline is still active.



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A 2019 State Department arms control compliance report documented Chinese missile systems flowing to Iran, North Korea, Syria, and Pakistan. By 2023, U.S. requests for China to stop the transfers remained unresolved.

The 2024 and 2025 arms compliance reports omitted all mention of Chinese missile proliferation. The CRS report noted, however, that separate State Department assessments from those same years confirmed Chinese companies and arms dealers “worked to supply technology and equipment that could be used to develop weapons of mass destruction and their missile delivery systems” to North Korea, Iran, and Pakistan.

Since 2024, the U.S. has sanctioned numerous Chinese companies and individuals for nuclear and missile proliferation. Those include Treasury Department actions targeting China’s missile support to Iran and Commerce Department sanctions on a Chinese firm tied to Pakistan’s nuclear program.

The CRS report also found that China is helping Saudi Arabia develop uranium production capacity and is constructing five nuclear reactors in Pakistan that violate Beijing’s own commitments under the Nuclear Suppliers Group. That agreement prohibits building reactors in Pakistan without International Atomic Energy Agency safeguards.

Chinese entities have also engaged in money laundering and proliferation financing “for the benefit of” Iranian and North Korean WMD programs, according to a Treasury report cited by CRS.

China’s nuclear proliferation activities trace back to the 1980s and 1990s, when Beijing provided design support that enabled Pakistan to develop nuclear weapons.

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