

Impacts of China's Nuclear Doctrine on International Nuclear Disarmament

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Nuclear weapons have been playing important role in China's national strategy. China's nuclear doctrine has been affiliated with and has served national development strategy, national security strategy, national defense policy and military strategy of China. China's nuclear doctrine has very strong continuity. On the other hand, China has made readjustments in its nuclear doctrine according to the changes of its internal and external situation and its general strategic threat perception. China's nuclear doctrine has experienced a process of evolution from anti-nuclear blackmail to minimum deterrence. There are five major parts in China's nuclear doctrine: policy of declaration, nuclear development, nuclear deployment, nuclear employment, and nuclear disarmament. Because China is faced with a different situation and has its own strategic culture, China has a nuclear doctrine with its own characteristics. China's nuclear doctrine has had positive impacts on the international nuclear disarmament

Evolution of China's General Strategic Threat Perception

China's general strategic threat perception has experienced a evolution. During the period of the Cold War, in mid-1960s, China regarded both superpowers- the U.S. and the Soviet Union-as its major enemies. From the end of the 1960s to late 1980s, especially since the armed conflicts on border with the Soviet Union in 1969 and then U.S. President Nixon visited China in 1972, China regarded the Soviet Union, as its major enemy. Since the end of the Cold War, China's general strategic threat perception has fundamentally changed. Now China does not regard any other country as its enemy. And, China has attached significant attention to the impacts of non-traditional security challenges on international relations, which have rapidly been rising since the September 11 Incident.

Non-traditional security challenges are also labeled global problems, transnational problems or low politics problems, including terrorism, proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) , piracy, environmental pollution, global warming, population explosion, drug trafficking, international crimes, HIV/AIDS, and so on. Non-traditional security threats have two major characteristics. One is that they exist in the whole world and are related to the whole human beings. Another one is that they threaten the existence and development of humanity. So major powers should abandon Cold War mentalities and accept the new security

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concepts based on cooperative security and common security.

At the same time, China also has some strategic concerns:

■ **How to maintain international strategic stability**

The framework of strategic stability between major powers is the foundation of global strategic stability. During the Cold War, strategic stability between major powers mainly consisted of stability of arms races and stability of crisis. Since the end of the Cold War, both the United States and Russia have reduced their strategic nuclear weapons. So it is now very possible to avoid nuclear arms race. However, major powers must make great efforts to avoid security dilemma, which may lead to a nuclear arms race between them. Major powers should maintain global strategic balance and stability and vigorously advance nuclear disarmament. All nuclear-weapon states should fulfill, in good faith, obligations under Article VI of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), and publicly undertake not to seek permanent possession of nuclear weapons.

■ **Missile defense system**

A global missile defense program will be detrimental to international strategic balance and stability, undermine international and regional security, and have a negative impact on the process of nuclear disarmament. For example, if the United States increase the number of interceptors of its strategic missile defense system, because 3-4 interceptors can intercept one attacking warhead, China has to increase the number of its intercontinental nuclear missiles in order to maintain the capability of its minimum nuclear deterrence, which means that China has to have one nuclear warhead, which can penetrate U.S. missile defense system to hit the United States after being attacked firstly by American nuclear weapons.

■ **U.S. nuclear strategy**

Taiwan issue, South China Sea issue, and Diaoyu Islands issue may lead to China-U.S. armed conflicts. Because the U.S. has the largest nuclear arsenal in the world and continues to pursue the nuclear strategy based on the policy of first-use of nuclear weapons, China has to maintain the minimum nuclear deterrence capability. If the U.S. increases the number of interceptors of its missile defense system, China has to raise its nuclear warhead count.

Role of the Nuclear Weapons in China's Military Strategy

Nuclear weapons have been playing an important role in China's national and military strategy. However, they have not played a key role. China's nuclear doctrine has gradually experienced the process change from a counter-nuclear blackmail strategy to a minimum deterrence strategy. Now the most important task

of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) is to win partial wars under the situation of high technology. Conventional forces are still the major implements used to win these kinds of wars. Nuclear weapons' major task of China is to deter the enemy from launching an initial nuclear attack against China.

From the first test of a nuclear weapon by China on October 16, 1964, to the mid-1980s, China's nuclear doctrine had been the counter-nuclear blackmail strategy. During the period, China's nuclear weapons had been few and had not reached the standard of the minimum deterrence strategy. This strategy would inflict an unaffordable loss by nuclear retaliation on any superpower that first launched a nuclear attack against China,. Furthermore, during this period, both Chinese Government and the PLA had not accepted the concept of nuclear deterrence. Some of Chinese experts even regarded the nuclear deterrence as a means for the superpowers to impose nuclear blackmail on other countries.

Since China's acquisition of nuclear weapons, it has not only broken the superpowers' nuclear monopolization, but also generated the capability to deny the nuclear blackmail from the superpowers. Identified below are some of the major features of the counter-nuclear blackmail strategy:

- 1. Firstly, the counter-nuclear blackmail strategy was established on the foundation of the concept of people determining the results of wars instead of the theory of nuclear taboo.** The basic reasons for China developing the counter-nuclear blackmail strategy were:
 - Nuclear weapons have two distinct characteristics. On one hand, they are weapons of massive destruction that can kill thousands of people. On the other hand, nuclear weapons cannot determine the results of wars.
 - Territorially, China is very big expansive with a vast of people, so there is deep potential and wide leeway for people's war in China.
- 2. Secondly, the counter-nuclear blackmail doctrine was a comprehensive strategy.** From October 1964 to 1985, China had prepared to fight a war at short notice, on a large scale, and in which nuclear weapons were used. According to the guideline of China's military strategy of active defense, it sped up the development of missiles with nuclear warheads. At the same time, China actively prepared for defending nuclear wars.

In October 1966, China had its first flight test of a medium-range missile with a nuclear warhead. On May 18, China tested its inter-continental ballistic missile, which flew successfully from West China to the South Pacific. From that time on, China has had the capability to attack a target on another continent.

From 1964, China began to build the areas of the big and small Third Defense Line. After the Armed Conflict between China and the Soviet Union in 1969, the Nine National Congress of Chinese Communist Party declared that China must prepare to fight a war at short notice, on a big scale, and involving nuclear weapons from both the Soviet Union and the United States. From the point on, China began to establish air-raid shelters, some of which withstand nuclear attack, on a big scale throughout the country. In 1972, Chairman Mao Zedong put forward the concept of “Digging deep shelters, Accumulating food in big stockpile, and Not seeking hegemony”, which became the national strategy for China guiding the process of China and guided the process to fight a war at short notice, on a large scale and in which nuclear weapons were used.

- 3. Thirdly, China’s counter-nuclear blackmail doctrine was of the view that finally winning a war will require conventional weapons.** Preparation to fight nuclear wars meant China not only prepared to defense against surprise nuclear attacks from a superpower, but also sought to defeat invading enemy with conventional weapons.

Since 1985, China has gradually transformed its nuclear doctrine from a counter-nuclear blackmail strategy to a minimum deterrence one. The major reasons for this transformation have been the following:

-- With the great efforts of many years, China has made great progress in developing its strategic nuclear forces. In September 1989, China finished establishing an integrated nuclear war-fighting system, which can effectively carry out strategic retaliation.

-- Since 1986, China has accepted the concept of nuclear deterrence and has regarded the nuclear deterrence as one part of its nuclear doctrine.

-- After the PLA’s large conventional force reduction, the importance of nuclear weapons in China has been increased. Since 1984, the PLA’s Second Artillery has entered the list of day-day combat readiness on duty. So carrying out the minimum deterrence strategy has been beneficial for preventing nuclear war against China.

Foundation of China’s Nuclear Doctrine

There are two basic starting points for China’s nuclear doctrine: China’s national security and humanitarianism.

- 1. Firstly, the maintenance of China’s national security is the fundamental motivation behind the development of nuclear weapons.** China has used its nuclear weapons as a means to prevent its enemies from imposing war on Chinese people. China developed its nuclear weapons under a very special

security environment during the Cold War, in which China had faced with the nuclear threats from one or even two superpowers.

2. Secondly, humanitarianism is one of the most important factors for China in developing its nuclear doctrine. From the first day China successfully tested its nuclear weapons, it has held that these weapons must be totally banned and thoroughly destroyed. China committed itself to never being the first to use nuclear weapons at any time and under any circumstance. This also means that China has regarded humanitarianism, which places the most attention on the lives of people at its core, as the one of pillars of Chinese nuclear doctrine. Compared with the nuclear strategy of MAD (Mutual Assurance of Destruction) of the United States and the Soviet Union during the Cold War, Chinese doctrine has commanded higher morality within the international community.

Structure of China's Nuclear Doctrine

Similar to the nuclear doctrines of other nuclear-weapon states, China's doctrine has composed five policies: policy of declaration, nuclear development, nuclear deployment, nuclear employment, and nuclear disarmament. Because China has a different strategic culture and is in a different situation, its nuclear doctrine has the following characteristics.

1. Firstly, the declared policy of China's nuclear doctrine is no-first use of nuclear weapons and self-defense.

From the start China has made it very clear that it will not use nuclear weapons first at any time and under any circumstance. No-first use of nuclear weapons has had strategic significance, and is based on deep consideration.

China believes that the final results of wars are decided by people instead of advanced weapons and WMD. The most significant foundation for China's national defense is the concept of People's War. Therefore, implementation of a policy of no-first use of nuclear weapons will affect the results of wars in the future.

The Sacred commitment to no-first use of nuclear weapons fully reflects the point that China's holding of nuclear weapons is totally for self-defense. China had been compelled to develop nuclear weapons, which contain wars.

This no-first use policy allows China to command high morality in the international community. Those countries and people that use nuclear weapons during invading wars will be pinups on the pillar of humanization of the history of humanity.

China's final purpose in developing nuclear weapons is to destroy nuclear weapons. The policy of no-first use is beneficial because it encourages the

international community to go forward towards this purpose.

2. Secondly, China's policy of nuclear development is the building of a lean and effective strategic nuclear force.

Chinese national security has mainly depended on a foreign policy of peace and the integrated power of People's War. Nuclear force is one of the most important pillars and parts of China's armed forces. However, it is not the foundation stone and the core of China's national defense forces. In order to reach the goal of deterring other countries from launching nuclear attacks against China, China must develop a strategic nuclear force with the capability of basic means of retaliation.

China has persisted in the principle of limited development of nuclear weapons, attaching a lot of importance to building a lean and effective strategic nuclear missile force. China does not seek the superiority of numbers in its nuclear force and would not want to have nuclear competition with other countries.

China has taken a very self-restrained attitude towards the development of nuclear weapons, so Chinese nuclear arsenal has been kept at a minimal level of self-defense.

3. Thirdly, China's policy of nuclear weapons deployment is to maintain a second strike capability.

China has focused on maintaining this capability in its nuclear weapons deployment--That is the capability of nuclear retaliation. China has never deployed nuclear weapons outside of it.

In 1979, the Central Committee of Chinese Communist Party made the decision to build the "Great Wall" Project, the purpose of which was to make China's land-based strategic nuclear force have the capability to survive and retaliate after suffering from a first nuclear strike by other countries.

In the summer of 1995, the "Great Wall" Project--under the Second Artillery--was completed. Therefore, the Chinese land-based strategic nuclear force has had underground positions for fighting, defending, being deposited, commanding and living. Even if struck by nuclear warheads launched from other countries, China's land-based strategic nuclear force can retaliate ten minutes, or after a few days, or even one month living in the underground bunkers.¹

Some Western experts said that the Second Artillery deploys land-based strategic nuclear missiles in "underground homes" hundreds of meters below ground, which allows them to endure hits from some nuclear bombs, equivalent to hundreds of thousands of TNT.

¹ Zhang Xuanjie and Qin Jie, Forty Years: the Second Artillery of China Cast and Made up the long Sward Breaking the Sky", Ban Yue Tan, No.13, 2006, pp.6.

Strategic nuclear submarines are also an important capability of second strike; they are beneficial for improving strategic stability between China and other nuclear powers. As Deng Xiaoping said, “our strategy has always been defense and will continue its strategic defense in the next twenty years, in which nuclear submarines are also weapons of strategic defense.”²

4. Fourthly, China’s policy of nuclear employment is self-defense and retaliation.

China has persisted in the principle of self-defense and retaliation. The Central Military Commission(CMC) has directly controlled and commanded the nuclear force of China. “The Second Artillery Force sticks to China's policy of no first use of nuclear weapons, implements a self-defensive nuclear strategy, strictly follows the orders of the CMC, and takes it as its fundamental mission the protection of China from any nuclear attack. In peacetime the nuclear missile weapons of the Second Artillery Force are not aimed at any country. But if China comes under a nuclear threat, the nuclear missile force of the Second Artillery Force will go into a state of alert, and get ready for a nuclear counterattack to deter the enemy from using nuclear weapons against China. If China comes under a nuclear attack, the nuclear missile force of the Second Artillery Force will use nuclear missiles to launch a resolute counterattack against the enemy either independently or together with the nuclear forces of other services.”³

After the armed conflicts between China and the Soviet Union at treasure Islands along China-Soviet border in 1969, the Soviet’s attempted to launch surgical nuclear attacks against important military and political targets. Therefore, the Second Artillery Force made final preparations for battle, which showed the firm resolution of China to retaliate and made Soviet leaders give up their attempt to launch nuclear attacks against China. This was the first and only time that China’s nuclear missile force of China entered the position of final preparation for battle.

In 1988, Deng Xiaoping put forward the concept of using strategic nuclear missiles as a form of guerrilla warfare,⁴ which meant that Deng Xiao asked for an increased mobilization of strategic missiles, so as to improve the capability of nuclear retaliation. Mao Zedong talked about the concept of putting-off nuclear counter-attacks.⁵ This would be one of ways of nuclear counter-attacks, which China may choose according to the strategic situation and within the principle of self-defense and retaliation in the future.

² Office of Literature Research of the Central Committee of Chinese Communist Party, “Chronology of Deng Xiaoping:1975-1997”, Beijing: Central Literature Publishing House, 2004, pp. 512.

³ The State Council Information Office of China, “the White Paper on China's National Defense: 2008”, Beijing, pp.26.

⁴ “Military of China-- Chronology of Nuclear Weapons of China” ,
(<http://jngs.3322.org/mymemo/military/nw/901.htm>).

⁵ Li Yueran, “Leaders of New China on Diplomatic Arena”, Beijing: Foreign Language Research and Teaching Publishing House, 1994, pp.136-137.

Because the possibility of the U.S. being militarily involved in an armed conflict between the two sides of Taiwan Strait exists--which could lead to further armed conflict, even Sino-U.S. nuclear conflict, China has to develop the capability to deter the U.S. from interfering militarily in an armed conflict in the Taiwan Strait. China is not a superpower and has a small number of nuclear weapons, so the model of MAD is not suitable for Sino-U.S. nuclear relations. China has some capability for nuclear retaliation. So long as China has the capability for one nuclear warhead to penetrate U.S. missile defense systems and hit American territory after a U.S. launched nuclear attacks against China, or so long as the U.S. cannot assure it could destroy all China's strategic nuclear force after an American first strike against China, it will be very difficult for the U.S. to make the decision to launch nuclear attacks against China.

5. Fifthly, China's policy of nuclear disarmament regards the complete prohibition and thorough destruction of nuclear weapons as the final goal in nuclear issues.

Impacts of China's nuclear Doctrine on the International Nuclear Arms Control

- **China has been the first among the nuclear weapon state, which put forward the concept of the nuclear weapon-free world as the final objective of its nuclear doctrine.**

Since 1963 China has consistently called for the "complete prohibition and thorough destruction" of nuclear weapons. Thus, China was the first country to regard a nuclear weapon-free world as China's final goal within the international community.

- **China's no-first use policy has greatly reduced the danger of nuclear armed conflicts and has very positive impacts on international nuclear disarmament.**
- **China's minimum deterrence strategy has made China's nuclear arsenal small.**
- **China has put forward a set of position on international nuclear disarmament.**

In 1994, in an effort to step by step, realize the objective of building a world free from nuclear weapons, China put forward a complete, interrelated proposal for the nuclear disarmament process at the 49th session of UN General Assembly. All nuclear-weapon states should unconditionally declare that they will not be the first to use nuclear weapons and immediately begin negotiations towards a treaty to this effect; efforts to establish nuclear-weapon-free zones should be supported and guarantees given not to use or threaten to use nuclear weapons against

non-nuclear-weapon states; a comprehensive nuclear test ban treaty should be negotiated and concluded no later than 1996; the major nuclear powers should implement existing nuclear disarmament treaties as scheduled and further substantially reduce their nuclear weapon stockpiles; a convention banning production of fissile materials for nuclear weapons be negotiated and concluded; a convention prohibiting all nuclear weapons be signed, whereby all nuclear-weapon states undertake to completely destroy existing stocks of nuclear weapons under effective international supervision; the proliferation of nuclear weapons should be prevented while the promoting of nuclear disarmament process and international cooperation in peaceful uses of nuclear energy should be pursued.⁶

Since then, China has also put forward some more views about nuclear disarmament. Up till now, China's stance on nuclear disarmament can be catalogued as follows:

- Nuclear major powers should give up their nuclear first-use policy;
- Nuclear-weapon states with big nuclear arsenals should further reduce their nuclear weapons;⁷
- All nuclear-weapon states should commit themselves not to be the first to use nuclear weapons, and should conclude international legally binding documents on this issue as soon as possible;
- All nuclear-weapon states should commit themselves not to use or threaten to use nuclear weapons against non-nuclear-weapon states or nuclear weapon-free zones, and should conclude international legally binding documents on this issue as soon as possible;
- All states deploying nuclear weapons abroad should commit themselves to supporting the appeal of establishing nuclear-weapon-free zones, respecting their positions, and bearing their relevant responsibilities;
- All states deploying nuclear weapons abroad should withdraw their nuclear weapons home;⁸
- All states should not develop and deploy weapon systems in outer space and missile defense system, which will disturb strategic security and stability;
- All states should negotiate and conclude international legally binding

⁶ Information Office of the State Council of the People's Republic of China, "China: Arms Control and Disarmament" (White Paper), Beijing, November 1995, pp.28-29.

⁷ Xia, Liping, "Arms Control and Security in the Asia-Pacific Region", Shanghai People's Publishing House, 2002, pp. 603.

⁸ Xia, Liping, "Arms Control and Security in the Asia-Pacific Region", Shanghai People's Publishing House, 2002, pp. 604.

documents on complete prohibition and thorough destruction of nuclear weapons.⁹

China has repeatedly called for an international convention to ban nuclear weapons, similar to the chemical and biological weapons conventions. China has been officially opposed to the policy of nuclear deterrence, based on the implicit or explicit threat to use nuclear weapons first, and to the deployment of nuclear weapons outside of national territories.

China advocates the prevention of proliferation of nuclear weapons as part of the process of eliminating such weapons. Chinese holds that in the process of reaching the objective of complete prohibition and thorough destruction of nuclear weapons, nuclear proliferation should be prevented.

China advocates the total prohibition of nuclear weapon explosion tests during the process of advancing towards the objective of complete prohibition and thorough destruction of nuclear weapons, and nuclear-free world.

On 29 July 1996, Chinese government declared that China suspended its nuclear explosion tests. China actively participated in the negotiations of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT), showing a constructive spirit and flexible attitude during the negotiations. On 24 September 1996, China signed the CTBT treaty. The treaty is the first international legally binding document, prohibiting any nuclear weapon explosion test or other nuclear explosion test in any environment, in any spot in the world, this is conducive to the process of nuclear disarmament and the prevention of nuclear proliferation, it improves international peace and security.

China endorses the verification measures to be taken in accordance with the regulation of the CTBT treaty. At the same time, China opposes any country who abuses the rights to interfere in China's internal affairs and to harm China's proper security interests.

China holds that a prohibition of nuclear test itself is not the objectives, but just one of the steps to realizing the final goal of complete prohibition and thorough destruction of nuclear weapons.

However, on 13 October, 1999, U.S. Senate failed in ratifying the CTBT. This failure has exerted great negative influence over the process of international arms control and may lead to new nuclear proliferation. Because of the failure, both India and Pakistan have still refused to sign the CTBT. Concerned with the intention of the United States, some other countries have slowed down the process of their ratification to the Treaty. The Russian State Duma ratified the CTBT on 21 April

⁹ Xia, Liping, "Arms Control and Security in the Asia-Pacific Region", Shanghai People's Publishing House, 2002, pp. 604.

2000. If U.S. Senate ratifies the CTBT Treaty in the future, the Chinese National People's Congress will ratify it the next day.