

Cooperation and differences between China and the United States in the field of arms control and nonproliferation

Gu Guoliang

**Director, Center for Arms Control and Nonproliferation Studies
Institute of American Studies, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences**

Over the past years, China and the United States have had good cooperation and major differences in the field of arms control and nonproliferation.

Evolving role of arms control and nonproliferation in China-US relations

We have witnessed the evolving process of the role of arms control and nonproliferation in the complex relationship between China and the United States. In the 1990s, the issue of arms control and nonproliferation was one of the three major issues of frictions (human rights, trade and proliferation), aside from the Taiwan issue, in China-US relations. At the beginning of the 21st century, the issue of arms control and nonproliferation was described as a bright spot in China-US relations by Mr. Liu Jieyi, former Director of Department of Arms control and Disarmament of the Chinese Foreign Ministry on several occasions. Today, the issue of arms control and nonproliferation remains a hot and prominent issue in China-US relations. The two countries are taking a more mature and pragmatic view of the issue. While continuing their traditional cooperation and differences, they have had cooperation in some new areas and faced some new challenges.

Cooperation and differences in the field of arms control

In recent years, cooperation based on common grounds between the two countries in the field of arms control continues to work. But there have been some new security concerns about each other. And there is an increase of mutual strategic suspicions.

Common goal shared by China and the United States

China and the United States share the common perspectives of the goal of achieving a nuclear free world. President Obama has declared his aspiration for a zero nuclear world and stressed the major threat to the United States comes from nuclear terrorism, and the possibility of a nuclear war between major nuclear states is remote. Thus, China and the United States have the same objective and task to work jointly in countering nuclear terrorism and strive for a nuclear free world.

A more or less stable nuclear relationship between the two countries

A nuclear relation of mutual deterrence or mutual vulnerability is more or less tacitly accepted by Obama's administration. Generally speaking, nuclear relation between the two countries is more or less stable. It has not been a priority issue in China-US strategic dialogues, and it has not affected good cooperation between China and the United States in their diplomatic, economic, cultural and other fields.

Major differences on nuclear doctrines and postures

The two countries continue to have major differences on their nuclear doctrines and postures, including minimum deterrence doctrine versus war fighting doctrine, no-first-use policy versus first-use policy, de-alerting status versus alerting status. The two countries also have major

differences on issues such as BMD program, US arms sale to Taiwan, and etc.

US greater concern about China's military modernization

The United States is concerned about the rising power of China, especially concerned about China's military modernization. There has been constant pressure on China's nuclear transparency while there emerge some suspicions of China's nuclear development, including the rumor of so-called underground nuclear great wall

China's suspicion of US intention of its "rebalancing Asia-Pacific" strategy

China is concerned about US new steps in implementing its extended deterrence in Asia, including its new deployment of radar systems in Japan and its new agreement with ROK on extending the range of Seoul's ballistic missiles from 300 to 800 kilometers. China is concerned about US nuclear cooperation with India. China is also concerned about US Prompt Global Strike program. China believes US actions have incited an arms race in the region and these concerns of China will certainly affect the pace of China's modernization of its national defense, including its development of nuclear program.

Increasing attention on issues of outer space and cyber security

Both sides are concerned about the issue of outer space. China is concerned about the weaponization of outer space while the United States is concerned about the development of China's anti-satellite capability. Both countries are concerned about cyber security, and there have been talks on cooperation on the issue between the two countries while different perceptions remain.

Cooperation and differences in the field of nonproliferation

China and the United States have both common grounds and major differences in their policies and approaches in handling proliferation issues. These features are fully reflected in their dealing with DPRK's and Iran's nuclear issues.

Common grounds and interests shared by the two countries

China and the United States share the view that prevention of the proliferation of WMD and their means of delivery is conducive to regional and global peace and serves the common interest of both China and the United States.

China and the United States firmly support NPT and other nonproliferation regimes. The two countries have had good cooperation and fruitful interactions in the field of nonproliferation, including their effective cooperation at the United Nations and the NPT review conferences.

China and the United States share the same goal of achieving a nuclear-free Korean Peninsula and both countries have had good cooperation in pushing forward the process of the six-party talks.

China and the United States would like to see a peaceful and stable Middle East. Both countries have had good cooperation in the P5 plus 1 nuclear talks with Iran.

Good cooperation in the new field of nuclear security

During the two Nuclear Security Summits, China and the United States have undertaken to take measures to counter nuclear terrorism, strengthen nuclear security by enhancing export control, and prevention of smuggling of nuclear and radiological materials. A number of concrete measures have been taken in implementing those undertakings, including good cooperation between Chinese Ministry of Commerce and US Department of Energy in nuclear export control and joint efforts by China Institute of Atomic Energy and US National Nuclear Security Administration in establishing the Center for Excellence for nuclear security in Beijing and

Radiation Detecting Training Center in Qinhuangdao, and etc.

Different approaches in their handling of proliferation issues

The United States prefers the approach of imposing sanctions and even the use of military force to achieve its policy goal of regime change. China pursues its traditional foreign policy of noninterference and stands for peaceful solutions through diplomatic means, and China is critical of the United States for its different criteria in dealing with different proliferators.

China and the United States have different threat perceptions, different security concerns, different interests and different relations with DPRK and Iran, which result in their different approaches in handling DPRK and Iran's nuclear issues.

Future prospects

Generally speaking, China and the United States will continue to cooperate with each other in the field of arms control and nonproliferation while their major differences remain.

Relatively stable nuclear relations

China will continue its modernization of national defense, but will not have a nuclear arms race with the United States. China will continue to pursue its no-first-use policy and a credible deterrent nuclear capability, no more, no less. China has learned the good lessons from the two nuclear superpowers, and will not be so unwise to spend so much money to build a huge nuclear arsenal and then spend so much money to dismantle them. So long the United States stops making efforts to negate the credibility of China's second strike capability, the nuclear relations between the two countries can be more or less stable.

Continuous cooperation in dealing with DPRK and Iran's nuclear issues

China and the United States will continue their cooperation in the field of nonproliferation. China is expecting some policy change by the new leadership in DPRK and hoping DPRK will return to the six-party- talks. The strategic decisions by DPRK and the United States will play the decisive roles. We'll see what will be new initiatives will emerge after the presidential elections in the United States and ROK.

As for Iran's nuclear issue, we'll see what policy or measures the new US administration will take after next month's election. China will continue to stand for a peaceful solution instead of using military force advocated by Israel.

Increasing strategic suspicions and frictions

Although China and the United States have a cooperative relation, the militaries of both countries view each other as potential rivals. The US National Security Strategy and defense reviews regard China as the biggest potential threat and rival. China also views the United States as the greatest potential threat, and suspects that the United States is containing and encircling China.

The recent US rebalances strategy has increased China's suspicion of US strategic intention. While Pentagon is going to cut its general defense budget in the coming years, it is enhancing its military deployment in Asia Pacific, using 60% of its defense budget in Asia-Pacific, increasing its joint military exercises, expanding its military bases and enhancing its military allied relations in the region, with a clear goal of rebalancing China. As China is becoming more resolute in defending its integrity of sovereignty, US continuous arms sale to Taiwan, its support of the separatist activities of Dalai Lama and Rebiya Kadeer will cause more frictions between the two countries. In particular, if the United States continues to play a partial role over the territorial disputes between China and Japan and the Phillippines, there is the possibility of US being

dragged into some military conflict with China by its military allies in the region. If the United States continues to take China as its major rival and take further measures to contain China, there will be more suspicions and frictions between the two countries.

The right way to enhance strategic reassurance and cooperation

China and the United States should enhance their strategic reassurance through dialogues at different levels. Over the past years, both sides have got better understanding of their common interests and their major differences, and understand how to expand their common interests and manage their differences. Strategic dialogues at various levels and crisis management mechanisms have been well established and working well.

It is particularly important to strengthen military to military relations between the two countries, as exchanges and dialogues between the US and Chinese militaries have lagged behind exchanges and dialogues in other fields. The two sides should strengthen their communication so as to have better understanding on their respective threat perceptions, military strategies, and national defense planning, instead of basing their military preparation on the "worst case scenario" category. The military leaders and experts should have in-depth dialogues on specific issues such as nuclear doctrines and policies, nuclear security, ballistic missile defense, outer space, cyber security, military transparency and etc. The two militaries should enhance their cooperation in countering terrorism, anti-pirates and UN peace-keeping. They should have more regular exchanges of visits and restore their lab to lab projects. Greater efforts should be made to remove the three major obstacles, the concerned provisions of US National Defense Authorization Act of 2000 in particular, which hinder further improvement of military to military exchanges between the two countries.

Conclusion

Over the past years, China and the United States have had good cooperation and major differences in the fields of arms control and nonproliferation. These cooperation and differences have played an important role in shaping China-US relations. At the same time, the development of the overall China-US relations also affects cooperation of the two countries in handling arms control and proliferation issues.

It is important for both sides to expand their overlapping interests, properly handling their differences, and safeguarding a stable and cooperative China-US relationship which match both countries' fundamental interests. Strategic dialogues are the best platforms for the two countries to reassure each other about their strategic intentions, with a view to avoid misunderstanding, misjudgment and especially the possible military conflict both sides do not want to see.