

# 2025 China-U.S. Nuclear Fail-Safe Dialogue

October 11–14, 2025  
Beijing, China

## MEETING SYNOPSIS

### Overview

- » On October 11–14 in Beijing, China, a delegation of American and Asian former officials and experts met with Chinese current and former officials and experts in meetings focused on nuclear fail-safe, which are safeguards that prevent the unauthorized, accidental, or mistaken use of a nuclear weapon. The 2025 workshop, hosted by the Grandview Institution, followed a successful [initial meeting](#) in October 2024. Like the 2024 workshop, this second meeting was organized with the support of the Asia-Pacific Leadership Network and Nuclear Threat Initiative.
- » The objective was to promote mutual understanding of nuclear fail-safe in China and the U.S. following the first dialogue. Discussion topics included the changes in the international security environment over the past year, and why these changes strengthened the case for fail-safe reviews in every nuclear armed state; the organization of the two U.S. fail-safe reviews; perspectives from China on the value of conducting a national fail-safe review; emerging technologies in the context of fail-safe; and pathways to facilitate global fail-safe.
- » Participants welcomed this dialogue and noted the greater analytic depth of discussions following a year of exploring the fail-safe concept. They also expressed strong interest in promoting the importance of fail-safe through the P5 process, expanding the dialogue to include a broader discussion of fail-safe, emerging technologies, nonproliferation and nuclear terrorism, and elevating the engagement to the Track 1.5 level.

### Participants agreed:

- » The global strategic and security environment has deteriorated since the 2024 workshop. This underlines the importance of candid strategic dialogue to promote mutual understanding and avert or manage crises, and the salience of nuclear fail-safe as a critical unilateral risk reduction measure amidst this rising instability.

- » A commitment by leaders to conduct a unilateral nuclear fail-safe review and enact its recommendations was necessary for its success. This requires no negotiation, treaty, or verification; and there is no requirement to share the results of these unilateral, internal reviews. While the 1990–1992 and 2022–2024 U.S. fail-safe reviews offer valuable notional templates for potential reviews by China and other nuclear-armed states, implementation of the 1990–1992 U.S. review recommendations took several years and spanned two presidential administrations.
- » The 1990–92 review not only featured unilateral recommendations (most of which remain classified), but also examined possible nuclear risk reduction policies relating to nuclear fail-safe that could involve bilateral or multilateral cooperation. One possible initiative to advance fail-safe would be to explore potential bilateral U.S.-China and multilateral policy recommendations, which could be discussed and agreed upon at the Track-2 level, and used to inform respective decisionmakers considering or implementing fail-safe reviews in their countries. Such measures could increase leadership decision-time as it relates to the possible use of nuclear weapons.
- » Other topics could include cooperation against nuclear terrorism and nuclear proliferation, and addressing the vulnerabilities that cyber, AI, space-based systems, and other emerging technologies could generate for national nuclear systems, which could lead to the unauthorized, accidental, or mistaken use of a nuclear weapon.
- » New and ongoing international conflicts since the 2024 workshop underlined the value of outreach to other nuclear-armed states on nuclear fail-safe. The differing quality of U.S. and Chinese relationships with certain individual nuclear-armed states meant that more effective progress on global fail-safe could be made by deeper Track-2 fail-safe engagements with specific states being led by the interlocutors with a closer relationship to that state, whether from the U.S. or China respectively.
- » The P5 process was a key forum for advancing global fail-safe, especially in the context of the upcoming 2026 NPT Review Conference. Efforts at the P5 Track-1 level and Track-2 level (such as the Young Professionals Network) to promote a P5 commitment to conduct fail-safe reviews could be pursued simultaneously.
- » Not all nuclear-armed states are recognized as such under the NPT, and fail-safe outreach to these states would have to be carefully managed to avoid conveying a de facto diplomatic recognition of status equivalent to that of NPT nuclear-weapon states.
- » Noting the ambitious agenda for future work, APLN, NTI, and Grandview agreed to coordinate a workplan for 2025–2026. Such a workplan could include the following broad components:
  1. Continuing our joint efforts to promote a fail-safe review in China, and NTI activities to engage and encourage the U.S. government to implement the 2022–24 fail-safe review findings.
  2. Upgrading U.S.-China fail-safe interactions to the Track 1.5 level. This included an invitation for U.S. Track-2 participation at a prominent MoD-hosted arms control forum in Changsha, Hunan Province, in 2026.
  3. Working together to promote a joint or coordinated statements by China and the U.S. on fail-safe, or perhaps a P5 statement in advance of next year's NPT Review Conference, if possible. This could be a simple statement similar to the January 2022 P5 statement that "A nuclear war cannot be won and must never be fought." However, as agreeing to a meaningful statement was the priority, the NPT Review Conference need not be the

deadline for coordinating a P5 statement if more time is required. Other opportunities could include a similar statement at the 2026 G7; the 2026 Munich Security Conference led by the Euro-Atlantic Security Leadership Group (EASLG); and Track-2 joint statements by senior figures from nuclear and non-nuclear weapon states.

4. Pursuing Track-2 fail-safe engagements with non-NPT nuclear-armed states, led by the interlocutors with the closest relationship to that state.
5. Explore a possible China/France/Russia/UK/U.S. Track 2/1.5 fail-safe workshop. This could be a 2026 or possibly 2027 initiative.
6. Planning for a third China-U.S. fail-safe dialogue in Beijing, circa October 2026.

### **Bottom line**

- » This second dialogue continued the remarkable progress and constructive engagements established in the 2024 workshop. The joint commitment to develop a detailed 2025–2026 workplan for advancing nuclear fail-safe was testament to this progress, as was the invitation to U.S. participants to attend the Track 1.5 arms control forum in Changsha in 2026. The three organizations look forward to building upon this strong platform through their joint activities in the coming year