CHINA'S NUCLEAR POLICY: AN OVERALL VIEW

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To date, the People's Republic of China still suffers from a distinct military inferiority in relation to the superpowers. Nevertheless, its modest but growing nuclear-missile capabilities do constitute an important factor in global strategic balance and arms control efforts.

This paper proposes to analyze China's nuclear policy and its international implications. It will begin with an examination of China's nuclear capability and strategic doctrine and then will follow with a discussion of the Chinese position toward arms control and disarmament (ACD), particularly Beijing's recent role in ACD negotiations.

DEVELOPMENT OF A NUCLEAR DETERRENT

It is a well-known fact that the PRC under Mao Zedong made an all-out effort to acquire nuclear weapons for security and prestige reasons, despite his frequent denouncement of the atomic bomb as a mere "paper tiger." A recent press report reveals how deeply the Chinese pride was hurt by the "Soviet betrayal" in 1959 concerning the sharing of atomic secrets. According to an article in the Jiefangjun Bao (Liberation Army Daily), China gave its first atomic bomb the code name of "596" to remember the "shameful" June of 1959 when the "perfidious" Russians tore up a 1957 agreement to aid China in making the A-bomb and withdraw from China their specialists including experts in atomic energy. Prompted by the Soviet

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action, the Chinese went ahead to research and detonate their first atomic bomb successfully on October 16, 1964, all on their own effort. "Our ancient nation which has long been looked down upon by some foreigners," said a commentary of the Liberation Army Daily, "has finally accomplished something that our forefathers were unable to do and that some foreigners thought only they themselves could accomplish."12

China's first nuclear device on October 14, 1964 was a 20 kiloton (KT) atomic bomb. On June 17, 1967 the PRC successfully tested a 3 megaton (MT) range hydrogen bomb. Thus China showed "a first-rate research, development, and production capability" by making the transition from fission to fusion in less than three years.3 A Chinese author took pride in pointing out that it took 7, 5, and 8 years respectively for the United States, England, and France to achieve the same transition.4 Since 1967 more than 20 nuclear tests have been conducted by the PRC, ranging from tactical weapons to hydrogen bombs.5 The latest blast, amounting to between 200 KT and 1 MT, was held on October 17, 1980.6 All told, China now has stockpiles of several hundred fission and fusion weapons.

Since April 1970 the PRC has launched twelve space satellites.7 It sent into orbit a cluster of three satellites by a single rocket on September 20, 1981.8 China's twelfth satellite, launched on September 4, 1982, was viewed as an indication that the PRC has probably perfected both solid and liquid fuel technology for rocket engines.9 According to Zhang Jun, Chinese Minister of Astronautics Industry, China is developing a new type of three-stage liquid-fuelled rocket

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5. For China's nuclear tests, see Appendix. Events up until the early 1970s may be found in one of many articles by Alice Langley Hsieh. See her "China's Nuclear-Missile Programme: Regional or Intercontinental," China Quarterly, No. 45, (January-March 1971), pp. 85-91.


7. For early developments, see Hsieh. "Regional," supra note 5, pp. 91-94.

8. UPI, Beijing, September 22, 1981.

to launch a geo-stationary satellite and a big near-earth orbital satellite in the days to come.\textsuperscript{10}

In terms of its strategic missiles deployed, China possesses about 50 medium-range ballistic missiles, MRBM's (CSS-1), with a range of 1,100 km, 65-85 intermediate-range ballistic missiles, IRBM's (CSS-2), with a range of 2,700 to 5,600 km, 4 multi-stage intercontinental ballistic missiles, ICBM's (CSS-3), with a limited range of 6,000-7,000 km, and 4 full-range ICBM's (CSS-4), with a range of 13,000 km.\textsuperscript{11} The successful test of a full-range ICBM in May 1980 demonstrated the impressive progress of the Chinese nuclear-missile program and the potential of Chinese missiles to reach any site in the Soviet Union as well as the West Coast of the United States.\textsuperscript{12}

In addition, China has some 90 TU-16 medium strategic bombers with a radius of action up to 3,000 km. It also test-fired in October 1982 its first submarine-launched missile from a nuclear-powered submarine, making the PRC only the fifth country to have successfully developed an SLBM.\textsuperscript{13}

On balance, the Chinese nuclear force has been improving steadily but its value as a viable deterrent is still arguable. Although widely dispersed, China's missiles currently operational are mainly liquid-fuelled, thus vulnerable to a Soviet first strike. In order to reduce the vulnerability of its nuclear deterrent, Beijing can be expected to continue an effort to develop a mobile land-based, seaborne or airborne strategic force.

**CHINA'S CHANGING STRATEGIC DOCTRINE**

The official doctrine that has shaped the PRC's military strategy and tactics in the last three decades is Mao's doctrine of "people's


With a special emphasis on political indoctrination and mobilization of the masses, it seeks to compensate for China's inferiority in weaponry by maximum use of manpower and revolutionary tactics. As a defense plan against a technologically superior enemy, it advocates a protracted war waged by the People's Liberation Army (PLA) with support of some 100 million militia forces to overwhelm the invader.

Thus far, Beijing has not made public any well-defined nuclear strategy but appears to have adopted the concept of minimum deterrence. To counteract the Soviet threat and pressure in recent years,
the Chinese have pursued the policy of continuing the development of a nuclear deterrent on the one hand, and emphasizing the defensive strategy of “people’s war” on the other. They may expect that the announced determination to fight protracted defensive war, along with China’s prudent external posture and pledge not to use the bomb first, will minimize the danger of a preventive attack. In fact, Beijing’s establishment of an American connection and its current efforts to form an international united front against “hegemonism” are also part of its overall strategy to improve national security and to gain time for further nuclear development.\textsuperscript{16}

In the context of China’s drive toward modernization, there seems to be a consensus among the Chinese elite on the need to modernize China’s armed forces. Nevertheless, a debate is continuing about the pace, nature, and means of this modernization. Illustrative is the fact that despite the recent reorganization of leadership structure the plan to restore military ranks is yet to be implemented. Still, the move is under way in the PRC to upgrade its national defense.\textsuperscript{17}

While continuing to pay lip service to the concept of “people’s war,” Chinese leaders now call for the modernization of strategy and weapons to meet the changing nature of warfare. “In the present stage in which science and technology is developing by leaps and bounds,” Defense Minister Xu Xiangqian wrote in 1978, “we shall be the subject to attack if we do not master all the weapons as well as the struggle tactics and methods which the enemy already possesses or may possess.”\textsuperscript{18} In an article written in 1981, the late Deputy


Chief of Staff of the PLA Yang Yong described Mao Zedong’s military though as still the guideline for army building and warfare today. It must be studied, however, with a scientific attitude of “seeking truth from facts” and “with the realities of our army and the demands of modern warfare in mind.” Only by scientifically drawing upon both Chinese and foreign experiences and by continuously seeking progress and improvement, he said, can the Chinese army be sure of success in its modernization and in any future war against aggression. 19

In a commentary dated January 15, 1983, the Liberation Army Daily described the strategic policy of the PLA as one of “active defense.” Since military campaigns against Vietnam, the commentary said, the PLA has “streamlined its training procedures, focusing on organization of different services to fight in coordination under modern conditions.” It also “has paid particular attention to foreign armies and modern wars, examined the requirement of actual combat, and outlined tactics to defeat an army with superior equipment.” 20

The PLA’s move in the direction of modernization and of revising its strategy and tactics was underscored by recent military exercises. In 1981 a large-scale coordinated combat exercise took place in North China (near Zhangjiakou), involving ground and air forces. 21 In 1982 a joint PLA maneuver was conducted in Ningxia, involving the assumed use of tactical nuclear weapons. 22

As a part of the overall picture, the Chinese appear to be starting the reassessment of their strategic thinking in the nuclear field. Beijing’s successful test of a full-range ICBM in May 1980, for instance, has been viewed by some observers as a sign that the Chinese strategy is moving from a minimum deterrence against one superpower to a more balanced two-pronged deterrence policy. 23 To be

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sure, the shift may not be so dramatic or imminent, for the Chinese have continued to picture the ICBM test as an important contribution to the cause of "international struggle against hegemonism." However, the development of Chinese ICBM force will doubtlessly enable Beijing to adopt a more flexible and independent strategic posture relative to Washington's policy. In this regard, there is a striking similarity between Chinese and French positions. Comparable to France in nuclear capability, the PRC is showing increasing interest in the complexities of nuclear strategy in general and the French decision to manufacture the neutron bomb and the role of tactical nuclear weapons in particular. Commenting on the French situation, the *Beijing Review* says:

> France has spent some 53,600 million U.S. dollars since 1960 to develop nuclear arms. Still, compared to the nuclear arsenals of the superpowers, France's is rather insignificant and it is this that has led French military experts to redesign their national defense to current realities. Here the research and manufacture of the neutron bomb figures prominently.

The implications of Chinese current interest in tactical nuclear weapons, the simulated use of which was reported in the 1982 Ningxia military exercise, suggest that notwithstanding its "no-first-use" pledge, the PRC may conceivably contemplate the compelled use of tactical nuclear weapons against superior invading forces in the name of self-defense.

CHINESE POLICY TOWARD ARMS CONTROL AND DISARMAMENT

The PRC's perception of security interest and the international balance of force has conditioned its stand on ACD issues. For years the Chinese have consistently advocated total nuclear disarmament and opposed the Superpowers' efforts to limited arms control. The

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Strategic Arms Limitation Talks, for example, have been denounced by Beijing as a "sham." According to Chinese spokesmen, the SALT agreements have actually permitted a fierce nuclear arms race between the United States and the Soviet Union and particularly enabled the latter to speed up the development of new and even more sophisticated strategic weapons.28

China has been and remains opposed to the Partial Test Ban Treaty (PTBT), the proposed comprehensive test ban treaty, and the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). Time and again, the Chinese have argued that these treaties are deceptive traps designed by the superpowers to disarm non-nuclear powers and that neither China nor other "peace-loving" countries should accept their restrictions.29 Chinese development of nuclear weapons has been justified as necessary for self-defense and the elimination of the U.S.-Soviet nuclear duopoly and blackmail. In every announcement of Chinese nuclear testing since 1964, the PRC has repeated the pledge that "it will never at any time or under any circumstances be the first to use nuclear weapons" and has challenged the other nuclear powers, especially the superpowers, to do the same.30

The PRC has also refused to join the other superpower-supported agreements such as the Outer Space Treaty, the Sea-Bed Treaties, the Convention Banning Biological Warfare, and the Convention on Environmental Warfare, even though it has no quarrel with the basic ideas of these treaties and has often found its negative stand contrary to the wishes of the majority in the UN General Assembly.31 By the same token, Beijing has objected to the convening of a world disarmament conference repeatedly proposed by the Soviet Union unless certain conditions are met. First, the prerequisites for the conference are a no-first-use pledge by all nuclear countries, particularly by the United States and the Soviet Union, and the withdrawal by the superpowers of all their armed forces, including their nuclear missile forces, from abroad. Second, the aim of the

30. For the Chinese government's statement announcing the first nuclear detonation on October 16, 1964, see Break the Nuclear Monopoly, Eliminate Nuclear Weapons (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1965), pp. 1-5.
31. Leng, supra note 27, pp. 169, 179.
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conference should be the complete prohibition and thorough de­
struction of nuclear weapons. According to the report of a UN Ad­
Hoc Committee in 1982, China and France continued to hold the
view that the convening of any world disarmament conference
"would serve no practical purpose in the present international polit­
cal climate."33

Despite China's opposition to the superpower-sponsored arms
control measures, it has been positive in approaching some other
ACD matters. The PRC has signed the treaty of Tlateloco to honor
the Latin American nuclear-free zone. It is on record in favor of the
establishment of nuclear-free zones or peace zones in Asia, the Pa­
cific, the Indian Ocean, the Mediterranean, the Middle East, Central
Europe, and Africa.34 In spite of their public opposition to the NPT,
the Chinese have tacitly followed a nonproliferation policy. There is
no evidence that China has aided any country in nuclear develop­
ment.35 Recent reports about China's "nuclear trade" with South
Africa and Pakistan's "planned nuclear tests on Chinese territory"
have been strongly denied by Beijing and Islamabad respectively.36
All things considered, the PRC's interests cannot conceivably be
served by nuclear proliferation, especially if Taiwan and South Ko­
rea acquire nuclear weapons.

In an apparent attempt to woo Third World countries, Beijing
has shown in recent years more flexibility in its ACD posture. This
was evidenced by the Chinese participation in the Tenth Special Ses­
sion of the UN General Assembly on Disarmament in 1978 at the
initiative of the nonaligned countries. The Special Session revital­
ized as the deliberative body on ACD issues the Disarmament Com­
mission to be composed of all UN members. It also replaced the
Geneva Conference of the Committee on Disarmament (CCD) with
an enlarged Committee on Disarmament (CD) as the new negotiat­
ing body for global disarmament, composed of all five nuclear states
and 35 non-nuclear stages.37

34. Leng, supra note 27, pp. 170-174.
To the UN Disarmament Commission, the Chinese delegation put forward in May 1979 a "comprehensive programme of disarmament." One novel feature of the Chinese plan was the call for superpowers to begin immediately reducing and destroying their nuclear armaments by stages:

When substantial progress has been made in the destruction of their nuclear weapons, thus closing the huge gap between their nuclear arsenals and those of the other nuclear states to the satisfaction of the majority of states, the other nuclear states shall then join them in negotiation for the total destruction of nuclear weapons.

Departing from China's past policy, the present plan also attached equal importance to the reduction of conventional armaments and asked the Soviet Union and the United States to be the first to greatly reduce their conventional arsenals. Again only "when substantial progress has been made in this regard, the other militarily significant states shall join them in reducing conventional armaments according to reasonable ratios."

A number of other points presented in the Chinese programme were obviously designed to appeal to the Third World. The following may be cited as examples. The actual process of disarmament "should benefit the economic and social development of states." No denuclearization agreement should deprive non-nuclear states of "their right to use nuclear energy and develop their nuclear industries for peaceful purposes." The organization and procedures of the disarmament machinery "should be free from superpower manipulation and control and should fully reflect the demands and wishes of all states in the world." The role of the United Nations in disarmament was given a special endorsement by the Chinese plan:

The UN General Assembly shall be kept informed of progress in all bilateral and multilateral disarmament negotiations. All parties to disarmament negotiations should earnestly consider and respect the recommendations and calls made by the General Assembly.

Finally, the Chinese plan included the total prohibition and destruction of all chemical and biological weapons and other weapons of mass destruction and a reiteration of Beijing's previous proposals for the establishment of nuclear-free zones, the withdrawal of all foreign troops, the dismantling of foreign military bases, and the undertaking by all nuclear powers, particularly the Soviet Union and the United States, not to use or threaten to use nuclear weapons against
non-nuclear states.\textsuperscript{38}

In June 1982 Huang Hua, China's Foreign Minister and Chairman of the Chinese Delegation, expounded the PRC position on the disarmament issue in a speech before the Second Special Session of the UN General Assembly on Disarmament. He blamed the superpowers for the lack of any real progress in disarmament since 1978, pointing out that they "are not all sincere about disarmament and have instead stepped up arms expansion." He then reiterated several points China had made before, i.e., the superpowers must reduce their arms first, conventional and nuclear disarmament should be carried out simultaneously, all states should participate in disarmament negotiations on an equal footing, etc.\textsuperscript{39}

Four measures were outlined in the disarmament proposal Huang and his delegation presented to the UN General Assembly. First, all nuclear states should reach an agreement on the non-use of nuclear weapons. Pending this, they should undertake unconditionally not to use nuclear weapons against non-nuclear countries or nuclear-free zones and not to be the first to use nuclear weapons against each other. Second, the Soviet Union and the United States should stop testing, improving, or manufacturing nuclear weapons and reduce by 50 percent all types of their nuclear weapons and means of delivery. Thereafter, China would join all other nuclear states in undertaking to stop the development and production of nuclear weapons and to reduce their respective nuclear arsenals according to agreed levels and procedures. Third, to move towards conventional disarmament at the same time, all countries should undertake not to use conventional forces for armed intervention or aggression and must withdraw troops from foreign soil immediately. The superpowers again should take the lead in substantially reducing their conventional forces. Only after this would China and other major powers join in conventional disarmament. Fourth, chemical weapons and other weapons of mass destruction should be prohibited.\textsuperscript{40}

In spite of repeating many of China's old themes, the 1982 proposal nonetheless contained something new. For the first time the PRC committed itself to engage in actual nuclear arms control arrangements after a 50 percent nuclear arms reduction by the Soviet Union and the United States. China also proposed an international

\textsuperscript{38} Text of the Chinese proposed plan in \textit{Beijing Review}, Vol. 22, No. 22 (June 1, 1979), pp. 17-18.


\textsuperscript{40} For the text, see \textit{Beijing Review}, Vol. 25, No. 28 (July 12, 1982), p. 11.
verification group be established to monitor the implementation of disarmament measures and to report to the UN General Assembly.\textsuperscript{41}

There have been other manifestations in recent years of Beijing’s increasingly active role in ACD matters. Early in 1980 the PRC participated for the first time, as a regular member, in the Committee on Disarmament in Geneva. Chinese delegates there have continued to expound China’s well-known stand on a number of ACD issues and to blame the superpowers, especially the Soviet Union, for intensifying international tensions and creating obstacles for disarmament negotiations.\textsuperscript{42} Since 1980 the PRC has also joined the United Nations Committee on the Peaceful Use of Outer Space. As said in its national paper, “China is ready to play an active role in this international organization, and, together with other countries, will strive to make a continuing contribution to the exploration and peaceful use of outer space.”\textsuperscript{43} In both the Committee on Disarmament and the Legal Sub-committee of the Committee on the Peaceful Use of Outer Space, Chinese representatives have stressed the need for adopting measures to prevent the militarization of outer space, including elaborating international law on the issue.\textsuperscript{44}

Even more significantly, the PRC lately is making a noticeable shift from its strong objection to any inspection of Chinese nuclear facilities by foreign powers or international groups like the International Atomic Energy Agency. According to both Chinese and American sources, good progress has been made between Beijing and Washington over a cooperation agreement in the peaceful use of nuclear energy.\textsuperscript{45} Under such an agreement inspection would be required by American law to ensure that nuclear material and high technology exported to China from the U.S. is used solely for civilian purposes. Furthermore, the PRC is currently in the process of entering negotiations with the International Atomic Energy Agency to discuss China’s entry into this UN affiliated body whose purpose is to develop peaceful use of the atom and to prevent its diversion into military channels. Along with this, Beijing is also reportedly prepared to take other steps to comply with international norms in

\textsuperscript{41} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{42} UN Doc. CD/PV. 105 (February 12, 1981), pp. 17-20; XINHUA, Geneva, August 4, 1981.
\textsuperscript{43} UN Doc. A/CONF. 101/AB/13 (June 16, 1981), p. 3.
\textsuperscript{44} The China Quarterly, No. 90 (June 1982), p. 358.
the nuclear area.\textsuperscript{46}

While continuing to abstain from voting on UN resolutions for stopping nuclear tests,\textsuperscript{47} the PRC has been showing an increasing interest in the worldwide anti-nuclear, peace movement. Speaking before the UN General Assembly in 1982, Huang Hua said,

In recent years the people of Europe, Japan, the United States and elsewhere have launched a mass movement against the nuclear arms race of the two superpowers and for preventing nuclear war. We fully understand and sympathize with their concern for peace and for the prevention of war.\textsuperscript{48}

Acknowledging the presence of divergent and complex forces behind the peace and anti-nuclear movement, a \textit{Hongqi} (Red Flag) author nevertheless contended in a 1983 article that "on the whole, the mass movement reflects the people’s just desire for peace and resentment against war, with their main efforts directed at the United States and the Soviet Union who are responsible for intensifying the arms race."\textsuperscript{49}

\textbf{CONCLUSION}

As noted in the preceding pages, China's nuclear policy regarding both weapon development and arms control has consistently aimed at the improvement of its unfavorable position in the existing military balance. Its current strategic imperative remains to be the deterrence of the Soviet Union through individual and joint international efforts.

To some observers, Beijing's disarmament plan makes good sense in the context of its nuclear position.\textsuperscript{50} To others, certain Chinese ACD propositions appear self-righteous and contradictory. Cited as an example for criticism is Beijing's contention that Chinese nuclear weapons work toward peace, while those of the superpowers, particularly the Soviet Union, work toward war.\textsuperscript{51}

\textsuperscript{51} Kim, supra note 37, p. 230.
Be that as it may, the present trend indicates that the Chinese are showing a greater interest in ACD matters while continuing the drive for a credible nuclear deterrent. Given its growing strategic capability and increasing interactions with the Third World countries, before too long the PRC may conceivably ease or abandon its opposition to the superpower-sponsored but UN-supported arms control measures and become actively as well as seriously engaged in major international ACD negotiations. After all, confronted with economic and technological constraints, the Chinese should know that their long-term interest lies not in a costly and dangerous arms race but in staged and realistic denuclearization leading to an eventual sharp reduction if not elimination of nuclear weapons by all powers. Much, however, still depends upon the superpowers to lead the way in showing bold statesmanship in the global politics of disarmaments.
### CHINA'S NUCLEAR TESTS

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