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**Establishing New China -US Strategic Stability:  
Opportunities and Challenges**

Lu Yin

Institute of Strategic Studies

National Defense University P.R. China

While the world has entered into the second decade of 21<sup>st</sup> century, the global strategic pattern, having experienced the post-cold war period, has witnessed the trend of globalization. The international strategic environment has undergone significant changes: cooperation and competition are interwoven among countries and a multi-polar structure has been formed. However, the global nuclear strategic posture has basically remained unchanged since the end of the Cold War, i.e., maintaining the bi-polar structure, and the United States and Russia have remained the two nuclear superpowers enjoying absolute nuclear supremacy.

The adjustment of US nuclear policy and posture by the Obama Administration has been affirmatively echoed by the Russian government. These two nuclear superpowers have achieved encouraging progress in the negotiation on nuclear disarmament, which aims at maintaining strategic stability. The new START came into effect as a result of the joint efforts of the two sides and this is of positive impact on global strategic security and stability.

At the same time, China and the United States share the responsibility of jointly maintaining world peace. With the expansion of cooperation between China and the United States and the growing aspiration of the people of the world for a world free of nuclear weapons, the new challenges to the global non-proliferation initiative need to be dealt with by the joint efforts of all countries, including China and the United States. At present, both opportunities and challenges co-exist for China and the United States to establish such a new type of strategic stability.

## **I. The window of opportunities**

### *1. Historic changes*

China and the United States, as the largest developing country and the largest developed country in the world, share the responsibility of stabilizing world politics and promoting global economic development. In this regard, the establishment of a sound and stable security relationship between the two countries is the immediate needs of the two sides and building a favorable strategic stability relationship and mechanism is an indispensably important component of it.

The strategic stability between the United States and the USSR (now Russia) was based on the balance of Mutual Assured Destruction (MAD) capabilities of both sides. When that kind of traditional strategic stability was formed, the two nuclear powers were adversaries to each

other and the bilateral nuclear relationship almost occupied the whole of US-USSR relationship. The global strategic environment had this main feature: two countries competing for superpower status and military hegemony.<sup>1</sup> Although such strategic stability maintained the strategic balance of super powers for some time and restricted arms race to a manageable situation, it did not change the nature of arms race and, as a matter of fact, resulted in arms race. This global security environment dramatically changed at the end of the Cold War. In the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, as a result of the adjustment of US nuclear policies by President Jr. Bush and President Obama, the US-Russia strategic stability, which mainly inherited the US-USSR strategic stability framework, gradually lost its balance.

The Bush Administration made the decision in 2001 to withdraw from the ABM treaty, which was regarded as the cornerstone of strategic stability. And in their arms control negotiations, the United States and Russia also bypassed the principles of verifiability and irreversibility, which were emphasized by traditional arms control and disarmament treaties. The NEW START, signed by the Obama Administration and the Russian government, did not impose any substantive restrictions on the development of the Ballistic Missile Defense system (BMD) or that of advanced conventional weapons; moreover, the treaty allowed the United States to maintain its strong “upload” capability<sup>2</sup>. This shows that the framework of US-Russia strategic stability has become more and more fragile. The latest development shows that the U.S.-Russia Missile Defense Talks have turned out to be a failure and Russia threatened to withdraw from New START while US insists on its BMD deployment. And this has clearly demonstrated the fragility of the framework<sup>3</sup>.

Under those circumstances, the type of strategic stability to be established between China and the United States will be definitely different from that between the United States and the USSR (now Russia). To achieve strategic stability between China and the United States, the following two key points should be taken into consideration: 1) China-US relationship is not an adversarial one. The nuclear relationship between the two countries is only one component of the

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<sup>1</sup> It primarily catered to the convenience of the world competition of the two superpowers. Their chief concern was the insurance of “a stable conflict” between themselves rather than a halt to it. See Camille Grand, *Ballistic Missile Threats, Missile Defenses, Deterrence, and Strategic Stability*, Occasional Paper No.5, (Monterey, CA and Southampton: Monterey Institute of International Studies and Mountbatten Centre for International Studies, March 2001), p.6.

<sup>2</sup> TREATY BETWEEN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA AND THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION ON MEASURES FOR THE FURTHER REDUCTION AND LIMITATION OF STRATEGIC OFFENSIVE ARMS., <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/140035.pdf>. (accessed October 2, 2011)

<sup>3</sup> Josh Rogin: Medvedev announces failure of U.S.-Russia missile defense talks; threatens to withdraw from New START, [http://thecable.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2011/11/23/medvedev\\_announces\\_failure\\_of\\_us\\_russia\\_missile\\_defense\\_talks](http://thecable.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2011/11/23/medvedev_announces_failure_of_us_russia_missile_defense_talks) threatens to withdraw (accessed November 24, 2011).

overall relationship and has long been placed in a minor place. 2) Enormous disparity of the strength of nuclear forces exists between the two countries. As a result, the former framework of US-USSR strategic stability, established under the pattern of balance of power and adversarial relationship, cannot be the option for China-US strategic stability, which is under the framework of imbalance of power and non-adversarial relationship. What is needed to establish between China and the United States is a new type of strategic stability framework.

### *Shared interests*

The strategic importance of China-US relationship has been ever-increasing. China and the United States are mutually dependent in a profound way, especially in the economic and trade area, and are now the second largest trading partners to each other. In the year of 2010, the amount of bilateral trade reached 385.34 billion USD, which was an increase of nearly 30% over that of the previous year<sup>4</sup>. China and the United States have engaged in cooperation on almost all global issues covering global financial crises, climate change and energy cooperation, anti-terrorism and non-proliferation efforts, anti-piracy operations, disaster relief, defusing humanitarian crises etc.<sup>5</sup>.

There are many advantages to establish China-US strategic stability against this background. Firstly, this is conducive to building a more solid foundation for bilateral cooperation, enhancing mutual trust, and expanding common interests so that China and the United States can make joint efforts to foster a positive, cooperative and comprehensive relationship. Secondly, this is conducive to avoiding miscalculation. With the growth of China's strength, the United States has become more and more concerned, especially with China's defense capabilities. Moreover, since there are no substantive changes to the nature of the Taiwan question as a severe obstacle of China-US relations, there is always the possibility of unstable relationship or even security crises, often as a result of miscalculation. To avoid this kind of unfavorable scenario, it is all the more necessary for both China and the United States to develop a stable strategic relationship. Thirdly, this is conducive to setting a good model for the rest of the world. China-US strategic stability is an important instrument to foster long-standing,

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<sup>4</sup>The Economic and Commercial Counselor's Office of the Embassy of the People's Republic of China in the United States of America: A Brief Information of the Economic and Trade Relations between China and the United States, June 6, 2011, <http://us.mofcom.gov.cn/aarticle/zxhz/hzjj/201106/20110607592547.html> (accessed November 1, 2011).

<sup>5</sup> 袁鹏: 《战略互信与战略稳定》, 《现代国际关系》2008年第1期。Yuan Peng: "Strategic Mutual Trust and Strategic Stability", contemporary International Relations, Volume 1, 2008.

stable and mature big power relations. And this is also a process to establish a new type of country-to-country relationship. A new China-US strategic stability relationship not only benefits the stability of China-US relations, but can also serve as a good model of establishing new strategic stability relationship among nuclear states in the current security environment.

### *Existing channels*

At present, based on the common aspiration of the two sides to establish a new type of China-US strategic stability, some channels have been set up in this regard. Firstly, both sides have already established some consensus on how to establish new strategic stability. The Chinese government, since its very first day of possessing nuclear weapons, has been consistently advocating the complete prohibition and thorough destruction of them. In September, 2009, Chinese President Hu Jintao made five proposals when he delivered a speech at the UN Security Council Summit on Nuclear Non-proliferation and Disarmament. And the first proposal was to “maintain global strategic balance and stability and vigorously advance nuclear disarmament”<sup>6</sup>. The Obama Administration upholds high the banner of “building a world free of nuclear weapons” and adopts a positive attitude towards the reduction of such weapons and has a pressing demand for non-proliferation. Especially, the Obama Administration often uses the term “strategic stability” to refer to the overall stability of China-US relationship. Secondly, the cooperation between the two sides in the areas involving nuclear issues has created favorable channels for establishing strategic stability. In the past years, China and the United States conducted productive cooperation in areas of anti-nuclear terrorism, prevention of nuclear proliferation, nuclear disarmament process under the UN framework, nuclear safety and security, and nuclear energy cooperation. All those practices have been widely appreciated by the international community.

### **The major challenges**

Since the end of the Cold War, China and the United States have conducted Track I, Track II or Track 1.5 dialogue in the area of strategic weapons, including some dialogue on nuclear strategy. The US side strongly urged to conduct consistent Track I dialogue on nuclear

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<sup>6</sup> Hu Jintao, “*Work Together to Build a World with Universal Security*” August 24, 2009. See Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China, “*Security Council Summit on Nuclear Non-proliferation and Disarmament Opens in New York ,Hu Jintao Attends the Summit and Delivers an Important Speech,*” September 25, 2009, <http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/zxxx/t616870.htm> (accessed January 3, 2010).

strategy so as to engage in substantive discussions on establishing strategic stability. And the Chinese side, considering all kinds of sensitive factors relating to nuclear strategic stability, responded in a prudent way.

The fact is that, if the dialogue on strategic stability is only confined to the nuclear area, it would be difficult to continue. Both sides should adopt a constructive and flexible attitude and explore new and feasible principles and methods to gradually establish a new type of strategic stability. However, such an idea is confronted with many realistic difficulties. For example, both *Ballistic Missile Defense Review* and *Nuclear Posture Review*, which were issued by the US Department of Defense in February and April 2010 respectively, proposed to maintain the strategic stability between the United States and Russia and that between the United States and China. To maintain its strategic stability with Russia is more or less the continuation of the thinking that is in line with the past US-USSR practice. It is worthwhile to note that, in those reports, the United States puts China on a par with Russia and seemed to have the intention to apply the framework of US-USSR strategic stability that was under a symmetric pattern of the nuclear forces of the two sides to the framework of US-China strategic stability that is under an asymmetric pattern. Obviously, such a statement does not truly reflect the reality of Chinese and U.S. nuclear forces and cannot be possibly accepted by the Chinese side. This highlights the stern challenges that China and the United States face in reality to establish strategic stability.

#### *Obstacles to bilateral security and military relations*

Lacking mutual trust is the most essential challenge between China and the United States. Compared with the economic cooperation between these two countries, the mutual trust in the military and security areas has kept a low level for a long time between China and the United States.

Given the disparity of nuclear capabilities between China and the United States, it is of great importance to establish an overall security environment in which the weaker side can have a sense of safety. The mutual trust to be established between China and the United States in the security and military areas can play a very positive role in establishing such a security environment.

In recent years, The Chinese Ministry of National Defense and the Chinese military made tremendous efforts to enhance communication and cooperation with the United States and

achieved positive results. High-level dialogue as well as a series of dialogue mechanisms, such as the defense consultative talks, military maritime consultative talks and the direct telephone link, served as effective channels to communicate and enhance mutual understanding, and enabled the exchanges between China and the United States in the security and military areas to enter into a new stage. On the other hand, the Chinese military took effective measures to increase military transparency, such as attempts to enhance information release and sharing, including publishing defense white papers regularly, appointing the spokesman and setting up the website for the Ministry of National Defense.<sup>7</sup>

However, the United States insists on selling arms, including offensive weapons to Taiwan, conducting intensive reconnaissance activities by means of warships and military aircraft along the Chinese coastline--a practice that has the conspicuous feature of the Cold War era; and restricting military-to-military exchanges by quoting domestic law restrictions; all those have made it impossible for the military-to-military exchanges to be on the right track of sound development.

Among those obstacles, the Taiwan question has always been the core issue affecting China-US mutual trust. In recent years, the cross-strait relations demonstrated the positive main stream of exchange and cooperation. The Chinese Communist Party and the Kuomintang (KMT) Party and the people across the strait conducted benignant interactions and the Economic Cooperation Framework Agreement (ECFA) pushed the cross-strait economic relations into the new stage of institutionalized cooperation, and the relevant discussions to explore the possibility of establishing a cross-strait military and security confidence-building mechanism made some progress. However, the United States has been continuing its arms sales to Taiwan. The latest move of the US government was its new announcement of \$5.85 billion package of arms sales to Taiwan, which, undoubtedly, sparked China's strong protest. According to incomplete statistics, in the past 30 years, the U.S. conducted more than 80 arms sales to Taiwan totaling approximately 40 billion USD, with a year average of 1.3 billion USD.<sup>8</sup> The FY2000 Defense Authorization Act restricts 12 areas of US-China military-to-military exchanges, including the

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<sup>7</sup> Lu Yin: *Relativity of Military Transparency*, China Daily October 29,2009,

<sup>8</sup> According to the RL30957 report published by Congressional Research Service of U.S., in the past 20 years, the total amount of US arms sales to Taiwan has reached \$24.50 billion. See Shirley A. Kan: Taiwan: Major U.S. Arms Sales Since 1990, Congressional Research Service, September 15, 2011, <http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/weapons/RL30957.pdf> (accessed September 24, 2011).

nuclear area<sup>9</sup>, covering almost all areas where China and the United States can further enhance mutual trust.

Meanwhile, the frequency of US reconnaissance activities in the air and sea areas of Chinese EEZ exceeded that of US reconnaissance activities against the USSR during the Cold War when the two countries were adversaries. The United States has its own arguments to justify its conduct, but the consequence is that those activities severely damaged the security environment involving China and the United States and resulted in a great sense of insecurity on the part of China as the weaker side. Obviously, this is not conducive to establishing the new type of China-US strategic stability.

#### *Asymmetric factors*

China-US nuclear relationship is based on the structure of asymmetric power and, at the same time, continues to develop in an asymmetric mode. This kind of asymmetry has caused concerns from both sides. On the one hand, China maintains its existing and very small amount of nuclear weapons and does not seek to develop or update them to the same level of nuclear weapon capabilities as that of the United States. However, seeing that the development of the US nuclear forces apparently enlarges the disparity of nuclear weapon capabilities between China and the United States, the Chinese side will inevitably have some doubts. On the other hand, the overall development of China's national strength and the progress in its military modernization drive has caused doubts in the United States.

The absolute superiority of the nuclear forces of the United States both in quantity and quality over China has been a long-standing fact. However, all the three editions of *Nuclear Posture Review* issued by the United States indicate that the tendency of "change" of US nuclear forces obviously places China's strategic security in a more and more disadvantageous position. And this fact has caused more Chinese concerns than the existing disparity of nuclear weapon capabilities between the two sides.

The 2010 edition of *Nuclear Posture Review* issued by the United States maintains both the old and new "triad" structures and continues with the tendency of weakening China's capability of strategic retaliation. A comprehensive analysis of those reports on strategic

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<sup>9</sup> National Defense Authorization Act For Fiscal Year 2000, Sec. 1201., Limitation on Military-to-Military Exchanges and Contacts with China's People's Liberation Army. <http://www.govtrack.us/congress/amendment.xpd?session=1068&amdt=h154>.



weapons issued in recent years by the United States reveal the following three conspicuous features:

Firstly, the United States has significantly increased the number of its Nuclear-powered Ballistic Missile Submarines (SSBNs) to be deployed in the Pacific Ocean, and at the same time increased the number of targets for nuclear strikes against China.<sup>10</sup>

The US Navy will retain all its 14 SSBNs for the near-term. Even if there is a possibility of reducing the number from 14 to 12, this will not affect the number of deployed nuclear warheads on SSBNs.<sup>11</sup> This situation has a negative effect on the positive trend of development of China-US strategic relationship as well as the maneuverability of China's strategic missiles. Secondly, the missile defense system of the United States not only damages the cornerstone of global strategic stability, but also poses a threat to such countries as China that possesses only a few nuclear weapons. The US administration emphasizes that the BMD system is purely defensive and targeted at such countries as DPRK and Iran, which pose threat to the United States. However, this is clearly not a convincing argument. Even some US officials responsible for missile defense projects believe that there is a China factor in the US efforts to deploy missile defense, at least so in the region of Northeast Asia.<sup>12</sup> Thirdly, the development of outer space radar by the United States increases the visibility of China's nuclear weapons and brings harm to the viability and maneuverability of China's strategic weapons.

The development of its strategic weapons by the United States will further reinforce the imbalance of China-US nuclear relationship and this has a negative impact on the efforts to establish China-US strategic stability. This situation has also resulted in two consequences: one is the growing concern of China when it comes to increasing transparency; the other is the subtle influence on China's long-standing constraint in developing its nuclear forces.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Natural Resources Defense Council, "US Nuclear forces,2007,"Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists, Vol .63,No.1,2007,pp79-82.

<sup>11</sup> 2010 Nuclear Posture Review report of the U.S., <http://www.defense.gov/npr/>. (accessed June 29,2011)

<sup>12</sup> See, for example, *Ann Scott Tyson*, "U.S. Missile Defense Being Expanded, General Says," *The Washington Post*, July 22, 2005, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2005/07/21/AR2005072102356.html> (accessed April 15, 2010).

The report quotes a comment by Air Force Lieutenant General Henry A. Obering III, Director of Missile Defense Agency:

"What...we have to do is, in our development program, be able to address the Chinese capabilities, because that's prudent."

<sup>13</sup>In fact, even in China, there are some suggestions on personal basis to expand China's nuclear deployment, though that is not the mainstream thought and cannot substantially affect the consistent nuclear policy adopted by the Chinese government. However, the increased disparity of the nuclear capabilities between China and the United States and the more and more aggressive attitude of the United States towards China have resulted in growing concerns of all walks of life in China that might influence, to some extent, the attitude of Chinese policy-makers.—Author's observation

*Definition of the concept*

Under the current strategic pattern, to define the concept of China-US strategic stability from the perspective of the actual situation of China-US strategic stability is itself an important realistic question. The general concepts and characteristics of strategic stability that originated from US-USSR strategic stability in the era of the Cold War was significantly different from the mode of strategic stability that needs to be established between China and the United States. Therefore, there is the necessity to define a new concept of strategic stability.

“Strategic stability” was one of the core concepts of arms control of strategic weapons, which has long been used to judge the effectiveness of arms control programs and plans.<sup>14</sup> In accordance with the concepts and definitions of traditional arms control theory, US-USSR strategic stability had such a framework: established on the basis of impasse of mutually assured destruction (MAD) capabilities; crisis stability, arms race stability and the prevention of proliferation were defined as the common interests of the two sides; and driven by respective global strategic options and domestic technological levels. The United States and the USSR, by means of a series of arms control treaties, reinforced the MAD situation, so that neither side dared to launch preemptive strikes against the other, so nuclear wars were effectively avoided.

It is apparent that, if only the narrow sense of the concept of strategic stability is applied, it is relatively difficult for China and the United States to establish a strategic stability relationship. In this regard, the type of strategic stability to be established between China and the United States will be definitely different from that between the United States and the USSR (now Russia). The attempt to establish a new type of strategic stability must be based on more comprehensive common interests and objectives of the two sides. Actually, even when the US side gives an explanation of China-US strategic stability, it more often than not covers the contents of military, security, political, diplomatic or even economic aspects. Facing the reality of China-US relationship, the US side has consciously or subconsciously opted for a more comprehensive concept of strategic stability.<sup>15</sup>

The current debate on China-US strategic stability is still in its initial stage of exploration. However, it is certain that China-US strategic stability is based on the stability of

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<sup>14</sup> 李彬著：《军备控制理论与分析》，国防工业出版社，2006年9月第1版，第5页。Li Bin: *Arms Control Theories and Analysis*, National Industry Press, 2006, P.5

<sup>15</sup> When Mr. Bader, the Senior Director for Asia, NSC and Mr. Steinberg, Deputy Secretary of State visited China in 2010, they proposed to explore to establish “a framework of long-term strategic stability”, which covers all aspects of bilateral relations.

the overall China-US security relationship. It must be a general concept, not solely confined to nuclear relationship. Moreover, an examination of the preference and needs of the concepts of “strategic stability” respectfully adopted by China and the United States indicates that those concepts are basically identical with the concepts of “strategic stability” that are being explored in arms control theory.<sup>16</sup> Therefore, the definition of strategic stability to be established between China and the United States remains within the boundary of the general concepts of arms control.

### **Ways and means**

Although China and the United States face enormous challenges, establishing strategic stability is greatly beneficial to both sides as well as the global security environment. And such efforts are very much worthwhile. The new type of strategic stability between China and the United States need such a framework: it is conducive to enhancing mutual trust, reducing the possibility of crises and conflicts and establishing a favorable security environment. For this purpose, some principles and concrete measures need to be formulated. Theoretically speaking, some guiding principles should be included as the framework; practically speaking, the No-First-Use (NFU) policy is of unique practical significance.

### *Guiding principles*

The guiding principles for establishing new China-US strategic stability should include but not be confined to the following:

- a. Respect each other and enhance mutual trust. Understand and fully respect the vital interests and security concerns of the other side and try to enlarge the common ground of respective strategic interests.
- b. Accept the reality of the disparity of the nuclear forces between the two sides. Do not regard the balance of MAD capabilities as the pre-condition or unilaterally undermine the capability of nuclear retaliation of the weaker side.
- c. Take initiatives to create a favorable domestic and international environment and differentiate between the responsibilities and obligations of the two sides. The two sides should assume their obligations on balanced instead of equal bases. The United States, as the stronger

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<sup>16</sup> 李彬著：《军备控制理论与分析》，国防工业出版社，2006年9月第1版，第4页。Li Bin: *Arms Control Theories and Analysis*, National Industry Press, 2006, P.4

side, is expected to take initiatives and demonstrate sincerity, while China will honor its own commitments and engage in active cooperation.

d. From easy issues to the difficult, make steady progress and gradually achieve substantive results.

*NFU policy as the foundation*

The NFU policy adopted by China is an unconditional no-first-us policy. China will never be the first to use nuclear weapons, nor will it use or threaten to use nuclear weapons against non-nuclear-weapon states or nuclear-weapon-free zones at any time and under any circumstances.<sup>17</sup> China's declaration of unconditional NFU policy means that China will not launch any preemptive nuclear strikes, nor will it use nuclear weapons as the last resort in conventional conflicts. On the one hand, China's NFU policy reflects the wisdom of the first generation of PRC leaders and their perception of nuclear weapons as an instrument only for defense. When China detonated its first nuclear bomb, the then Chinese leaders had a clear understanding of the enormous political and moral pressure of using nuclear weapons as offensive weapons and of the real role of nuclear weapons only as defensive weapons. In the nineteen sixties of the last century, Chinese leader Mao Zedong once said to Mr. Edgar Snow, a US journalist, it is a crime to drop nuclear weapons randomly. If we have the bomb, we won't drop them randomly. Otherwise, it will be a crime.<sup>18</sup>

On the other hand, the NFU policy also reflects the confidence of China in the capability of conventional weapons. The NFU policy is conducive not only to boosting China's positive image and its force development, but also to maintaining the peace and stability of the world. Therefore, China has been upholding this policy for many years and will never give up this policy in the future.

Meanwhile, China has been actively calling upon all nuclear weapon powers to follow this policy, so as to demonstrate the sincerity of nuclear weapon powers and ensure the safety of

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<sup>17</sup> China holds that, before the complete prohibition and thorough destruction of nuclear weapons, all nuclear-weapon states should abandon any nuclear deterrence policy that is based on first-use of nuclear weapons, make an unequivocal commitment that under no circumstances will they use or threaten to use nuclear weapons against non-nuclear-weapon states or nuclear-weapon-free zones, and negotiate an international legal instrument in this regard. Refer to China's National Defense in 2010, published by Foreign Languages Press Co.Ltd, Beijing, China, 2011.

<sup>18</sup> 中华人民共和国外交部、中共中央文献研究室编：《毛泽东外交文选》，第453页。The Ministry of Foreign Affairs & the Literature Studies Center of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China: "Selected Writings on Diplomacy by Mao Zedong".

countries without nuclear weapons. Therefore, if the policy of unconditional NFU can be accepted as the foundation of strategic stability framework, its operability and practical effects will be very positive.

a. The advantages of using NFU policy as the foundation for China-US strategic stability

If the details of NFU policy are defined, here are its main characteristics --verifiable characteristics:

--No need to maintain a large nuclear force for preemptive strikes

--No need to put the nuclear force on a hair-trigger alertness

--No need to load warheads onto carrying vehicles all the time

--No need to seek a war-fighting capability, or weapons for non-strategic purpose

--No need to be engaged in a nuclear arms race with any other nuclear weapon powers.

The characteristics of the NFU policy demonstrate the following advantages for establishing China-US strategic stability:

a. Arms race stability can be enhanced. The adoption of the NFU policy is beneficial to enhancing the stability of existing nuclear weapon capabilities of both countries and avoiding potential arms race. The huge disparity of the nuclear forces between China and the United States is the product of special historic conditions. If the NFU policy is accepted as the foundation for establishing strategic stability, then both China and the United States do not have to consider preemptive nuclear strikes against each other as an option when building their nuclear arsenals.

On the one hand, China will maintain the consistency of its nuclear policy characterized by its defensive nature. And the focus of China's nuclear arsenal will be on maintaining a small but creditable retaliatory force. This means that an appropriate number of warheads, not too big, but adequate to ensure the survivability of at least some portion of its force after absorbing a preemptive strike. All that can enable China to be free from engaging in an arms race with the US, and to exercise great restraint in the building of its nuclear force.

On the other hand, although in the foreseeable future, the United States cannot possibly reduce its nuclear forces to the same level as China, the framework of China-US strategic stability with the NFU policy as the foundation will enable the United States to clear its concerns over the possibility of China's expansion of its nuclear arsenal. Moreover, this situation will enable the United States to reduce expenditure on redundant nuclear weapons and continue its

nuclear disarmament process with Russia, thus eventually reducing the incentives for arms race.

b. Crisis stability can be enhanced. The NFU policy is conducive to avoiding miscalculation and lowering the possibility of nuclear accidents. Strategic stability based on the NFU policy frees the concerns of the two sides over the possibility of being attacked by preemptive nuclear strikes, thus miscalculation can be avoided, nuclear taboo ensured and the possibility of preemptive nuclear strikes during crisis very much lowered. Meanwhile, the NFU policy also entails a reasonable alertness on both sides to prepare for dealing any contingencies, but not necessarily keeping nuclear forces on a hair-trigger alert. Since the action is a counterattack after a nuclear attack, which may usually take days to determine whether a real nuclear attack has actually occurred on the own soil, and to pinpoint who did it, there is no need for China and the US to mate the warheads with the carrying vehicles all the time. In general, this situation is very useful for the purpose of avoiding nuclear crises and will significantly lower the probability of accidental launch.

c. The global mechanism of nuclear non-proliferation can be further consolidated. The NFU policy can fundamentally lower the role of nuclear weapons and guarantee that no relevant countries will launch preemptive strikes, and nor will they use nuclear strikes as the last resort to handle conventional conflicts. This can remove the concern of countries without nuclear weapons or at the threshold of possessing nuclear weapons and weaken their intention to develop nuclear weapons. And, as a linkage, this can also narrow the channels for terrorists to acquire nuclear weapons. Therefore, in a general sense, this situation is good for the consolidation of the nuclear non-proliferation mechanism.<sup>19</sup>

d. The sincerity of China and the United States, as the two major countries in the world, to strive for a nuclear weapon free world can be better manifested. The NFU policy can demonstrate not only the responsible attitude of big powers to achieve the goal of a world free of nuclear weapons, but also their actions towards those objectives.

e. The public image and moral position of the United States can be boosted. From a policy perspective, there exist some commonalities between the Chinese NFU policy and the US policy of reinforcing the development of conventional weapons. And the former can reinforce

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<sup>19</sup> For the discussion of this point of view, see, for example, Pan Zhenqiang, "On China's No First Use of Nuclear Weapons," paper presented at Pugwash Meeting No. 279, London, November 15–17, 2001, <http://www.pugwash.org/reports/nw/zhenqiang.htm> (accessed June 15, 2008).

the credibility of the latter and help to neutralize the criticism by relevant countries on the US plan to research, develop and deploy the BMD system, and also relieve the pressure on the US maintenance plan of its nuclear arsenal. From a political perspective, the NFU policy can consolidate the leading position of the United States in the global efforts to prevent nuclear proliferation and reinforce US-Russia strategic stability.

f. China-US mutual trust in the strategic and security areas can be enhanced and China-US cooperation can be expanded. And this is of far-reaching significance for the overall China-US relationship.

It should also be noted that some obstacles need to be removed to adopt the NFU policy. To establish China-US strategic stability based on the NFU policy, the biggest obstacle to overcome may be the concern of the United States over the possible loss of credibility of its extended deterrence policy. The concern of the United States over the possibility that its allies might develop their own nuclear forces or the possible opposition of the allies to this policy, have jointly affected US determination to adopt the NFU policy. The description of conditional NFU policy in the new edition of *Nuclear Posture Review* reflects not only the progress of US nuclear policy but also the related debates.

In fact, the NFU policy will not affect the credibility and reliability of US extended deterrence policy. On the one hand, the NFU policy does not deny the use of nuclear weapons for retaliation or nuclear counter-attack.<sup>20</sup> When an ally of the United States is attacked by the nuclear weapons of another country, the United States can retaliate by using nuclear weapons, even massively, and this capability can sufficiently prevent any other countries from using nuclear weapons to attack US allies. On the other hand, the incomparable conventional weapon capabilities of the United States have already been providing extended deterrence. As time goes by, the role of nuclear weapons in the national security of the United States will inevitably be reduced. To conclude, the history and current situation of the policy of extended deterrence prove that this policy itself does not contradict the NFU policy and nor will it affect the credibility of the latter. On the contrary, with the further development of US conventional forces and weapons, the NFU policy can actually increase the credibility of extended deterrence policy of the United States, because the former is operable and also more credible in practice.

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<sup>20</sup> For a similar argument about the compatibility between NFU and extended deterrence, see Sagan, “*The Case for No First Use*,” pp. 167–169.

*Current steps*

Currently, the feasible steps should first include policy explanations and then reaching agreements or signing treaties. However, given the complexity and diversity of the nature of China-US relationship, the difficulties that exist to establish new strategic stability should never be overestimated. In view of all that, the two sides should expect a step-by-step and gradually maturing process to establish new strategic stability. At present, the two sides can do the following;

a. Continue to strengthen bilateral cooperation in the areas of regional nuclear non-proliferation, anti-nuclear terrorism, peaceful use of nuclear energy and joint exploration on nuclear safety. And make efforts to eliminate the political roots that cause nuclear proliferation and nuclear terrorism

b. Continue to maintain and strengthen nuclear taboo and show clear-cut opposition against marginal actions to develop nuclear weapons, including small-size nuclear weapons and conventional strategic offensive weapons.

c. The US side is expected to show sincerity and take concrete actions to gradually reduce and eventually terminate arms sales to Taiwan, remove the restrictions on China-US military-to-military exchanges imposed by *the Taiwan Relations Act* and *FY2000 Defense Authorization Act*, gradually reduce and eventually stop the reconnaissance activities in or over Chinese EEZ, and take practical actions to enhance China-US mutual trust, especially in the security area.

d. In view of the fact that China has become more and more transparent in the security and military areas, the US side should accept the current transparency development, which is based on respective national interests, and stop coercing China to increase transparency in accordance with the needs of US interests.

e. Continue to conduct positive and effective discussions on the guiding principles, methods and practical steps towards establishing new strategic stability. And the discussions can start from the academic circle and then expand to the official circle, and gradually reach consensus in both theory and practice.