

China Security

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Nuclear North Korea

Coping with a Nuclear North Korea

Zhang Liangui

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Shen Dingli

Shifting Tides: China and North Korea

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Situation Report

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Coping with a Nuclear North Korea

Zhang Liangui

On Oct. 9, 2006, North Korea brazenly carried out a nuclear test in defiance of the international community. The test reveals that long ago the DPRK's leaders made a decision to develop and possess nuclear weapons. Having crossed the nuclear threshold, it is unlikely that Pyongyang will give up its possession of such weapons.

North Korea's action was undoubtedly a challenge to the international community's staunch opposition to nuclear proliferation. It has furthermore seriously damaged peace and stability in Northeast Asia. If North Korea's acquisition of nuclear weapons is analyzed from the perspective of the North Korean nuclear crisis as a process still underway as well as the result of North Korea already a nuclear nation, we find that the degree of cost and benefit differs for each of the relevant parties. Regardless, however, China is the biggest loser.

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The North Korean move clearly runs counter to its own repeated promise to keep the Korean Peninsula free of nuclear weapons and has crossed the red line set by the international community on the issue. Therefore, Pyongyang's nuclear status is still reversible, and all concerned nations should continue to seek new methods to bring about denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula. However, all available options have very difficult tradeoffs for China.

Lessons from the North Korean Nuclear Test

The nuclear test conducted by the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK), commonly known as North Korea, reveals that government leaders long ago made a decision to develop and possess nuclear weapons. Having made such a commitment, it is unlikely that they will give them up – not for anything.

For a long period of time there has been a theory that the North Korean claim to develop nuclear weapons was a bluff, that in fact, it had neither the desire nor the ability to carry it through. Later, the progress North Korea made in the field led to the theory that its development of nuclear weapons aimed to discourage invasion, since the United States labeled it as part of the “axis of evil” and threatened its security. It now seems clear that neither theory is necessarily accurate.

The impetus of North Korea's development of nuclear weapons goes beyond the events of the recent past. The development of nuclear weapons is no trivial pursuit and data shows that the DPRK has been pursuing nuclear technology for decades.¹ It requires great human ingenuity, massive material and financial resources, all underpinned by long-term sustained effort. In the late 1950s, North Korea signed two agreements with the Soviet Union for cooperation in nuclear technology. In the 1960s, it constructed the Yongbyon nuclear R&D complex and has been steadily advancing its nuclear program ever since. Despite having signed the *Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons* (NPT) in the mid-1980s, the *Joint Declaration on the Denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula* with South Korea and the 1994 *Agreed Framework* between the USA and the DPRK, North Korea never stopped its nuclear program throughout this time.

North Korean resolve to possess nuclear weapons can be understood to have both an ‘ultimate objective’ and ‘process objectives’. Its ultimate objective is to master a powerful instrument in order to constrain the surrounding

big powers and work to transform its strategic relations with them. One only needs to carefully read the collection of articles by the past two generations of North Korean leaders to know that they believe North Korean history is replete with invasion and intervention by other powers. They even have their own explanation along this theme of why China aided North Korea against

American aggression. Given the perceived gap in its strength compared with the major powers, the mastery of nuclear weapons was considered by North Korea to be an inevitable choice.

In addition, nuclear weapons also serve to restore the strategic balance – even if only psychological – with South Korea. Since 1948, when the North and South

states were founded, there has existed an acute struggle over inheritance of the Korean Peninsula. The balance of comprehensive national strength began to tip in the early 1970s, and widened dramatically with the South's economic power growing 30 times greater than the North. Frustrating the North is the fact that there is no conceivable reversal for the near future. North Korean leaders see mastering nuclear weapons as the only possible measure to dispel the fear of failure in this competition and, even possibly to take the initiative in unifying the Korean Peninsula through force.

North Korea's nuclear program was for a long period of time a highly covert operation but once the program was exposed by the outside world, North Korea turned it into a tool for pursuing practical interests, thus generating a number of 'process objectives':

First, Pyongyang aims to use its nuclear program to meet domestic political needs. With a stagnant economy and worsening poverty of its people, successful tests provide them with an explanation since nuclear weapons are regarded as a symbol of national strength and scientific and technological prowess. This can be seen in slogans like "military-first politics" and "construct a powerful country." The nuclear program helps to stabilize society, eliminate feelings of failure and enhance the legitimacy of the system.

Secondly, it can be used as leverage for seeking practical gains. The United States is the undisputed superpower in the modern world. North Korea is eager to break the ice and improve its relations with the United States, but has been given the cold shoulder. North Korean leaders feel that only by

To constrain the surrounding big powers, North Korea's ultimate objective is to master nuclear weapons.

developing nuclear weapons is it possible to capture the attention of the United States and hold bilateral talks because the United States cares most about nuclear proliferation. Meanwhile, North Korea can leverage its nuclear program to strengthen its hand in negotiations with the United States. When necessary, North Korea can make limited concessions (such as temporarily slowing down or freezing its nuclear program) in exchange for substantive economic benefits and diplomatic gains.

The third objective is to prevent a U.S. invasion. North Korean leaders have always lacked confidence in their own security. The Iraq war thoroughly reinforced that notion. If Saddam Hussein had nuclear weapons at his disposal, the United States would not have dared to attack and topple him – so the logic goes. This is why, after Baghdad was occupied in April 2003, North Korea broke away from its former tactic of denial and began to openly declare its intention to develop nuclear weapons at every opportunity in a bid to discourage the United States from attacking it as well.

Crossing the Nuclear Threshold

Throughout the past years of negotiations, North Korea has obscured its real intentions. In the hurly-burly of complex talks, Pyongyang has deluded all the concerned countries into believing that it could be persuaded to give up its nuclear program. In this way, North Korea has bought itself more than a decade, safely passing unscathed through the period of tense security crisis, and successfully stepping over the nuclear threshold.

Although North Korea had previously succeeded in mastering the technology for nuclear armaments, it had never conducted a nuclear test.

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征稿

《中国安全》季刊欢迎中美两国学者、军界及政府官员、商界、科技界及金融界人士的投稿。季刊每期关注一个同中国未来走向紧密相关的主题，同时接收深度分析中国安全挑战的时政问题稿件。投稿须是未发表的原创论文、为学者型深度分析而非评论、须有引文出处的中文或英文稿件。

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Therefore, the military value of its nuclear program was not only doubted by the outside world, it cast grave suspicion on North Korea. Consequently, North Korea had to fulfill two pressing tasks for its nuclear program. The one is to carry out a nuclear blast to verify its capability and possession of an atomic bomb, which was also needed to further design improvements in terms of miniaturization and application. The other goal is to speed up the improvement of its missile technology including short-range, medium-range and long-range missiles to provide means of delivery for its nuclear weapons.²

Both goals of North Korea's nuclear program were advanced with the test firing of seven missiles of a variety of models on July 4 and the nuclear detonation on October 9 of this year. The DPRK's leaders have decided upon the possession of nuclear weapons as its strategic policy, therefore the country will surely carry out more nuclear explosion tests in the future, indicating that North Korea has truly passed over the nuclear threshold. The denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula has been forcefully shattered.

Six-Party Talks Bogged Down

The effect of this on the six-party talks is that they are now hopelessly bogged down with little chance of resumption. Many countries are still calling to restart the talks but even if North Korea agrees to return to the talks under current international pressure, another round will unlikely achieve any practical result.

First of all, the fate of the six-party talks is ultimately due to the fact that the diplomatic objectives of each side are perceived differently, leading to a number of contradictions. North Korea has always stressed that the nuclear issue is a matter between it and the United States, and all the other countries that interfere are merely "third parties." North Korea took part in the six-party talks because it was trying to find an opportunity and channel by which to become reconciled with the United States when bilateral talks were out of the question. It also needed to play for time with the international community.

When the six-party talks merely became a mechanism whereby to solve the North Korean nuclear issue through negotiations, as with this latest and longest battery of talks beginning in August of 2003, they fundamentally became incongruent with North Korea's interests. Being forced to discuss the topic it was most loath to discuss, namely, its denuclearization, it began tactics of obfuscation.³

That the five rounds of six-party talks were carried through to five rounds speaks to the fact that both North Korea and the United States wanted to use them as a stalling technique to put off a showdown between one another. By contrast, the other countries considered the six-party talks as a process, perhaps even the only process, to really resolve the problem. These differences ultimately made the talks a mere formality.

Take for instance the dispute following the Phase I meetings of the fifth round. The six-party talks came to a standstill ostensibly because of the financial sanctions imposed on North Korea by the United States in October of 2005, an act that North Korea claimed had ruined the atmosphere of the talks. However, the real reason was that it eliminated the talks' function of delaying the showdown between North Korea and the United States. When the Joint Statement of 'material content' was adopted at the conclusion of the fourth round it directed the discussions for the fifth session toward specific measures for abandonment of nuclear weapons, thus ending the stalling allowed by the "non-substantive stage" of the earlier rounds.

It has been 15 years since the emergence of the North Korean nuclear issue and four years since the outbreak of the second North Korean nuclear crisis. The reason that no showdown occurred during the period is that all the parties concerned needed the process to drag on. On the part of North Korea, it needed to buy time to develop its weapons; on the part of the United States, it believed that North Korea's nuclear weapons were not a direct threat to it for the time being and it had more urgent issues to deal with, such as the Iranian nuclear issue. In addition, the United States also wanted to convince South Korea and China that the North Korean nuclear issue could not be solved through dialogue. South Korea had no alternative, fearing a war might ruin the progress of decades of its economic development. As for China and Russia, they believed that the development of nuclear weapons by North Korea was just a bluff and, even if they were real, they would not constitute a threat to them and even, to the contrary, would be a card to play against the United States.

But things have irrevocably changed. Although North Korea may succumb to another form of talks to replace the six-party talks, such as new three-party or four-party talks, under sufficient international pressure, their mandate will

The DPRK has held the initiative while the big powers have taken a back seat.

certainly not be accepted as a mere reinstatement of the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula, as hoped, but must be about new topics. North Korea will be speaking about nuclear disarmament in the capacity of a “nuclear power” and will demand other nuclear powers to concede to reduction and disarmament requests before discussing North Korea’s nuclear situation. If they refuse, it can charge them with torpedoing the talks. It is also noteworthy, that any new talks will start from scratch, buying more time for North Korea.

All nations concerned must face facts: so far North Korea has held the initiative on the nuclear issue, while all the other big powers have been in the back seat. Until now, the fundamental needs and policy of the United States, South Korea, China, Russia and Japan in the North Korean nuclear issue have remained unchanged. They want to keep up the current slow pace and continue the talks without setting deadlines. But the needs of North Korea have changed.

In declaring itself in possession of nuclear weapons on Feb. 10, 2005, North Korea has transformed its position on the nuclear issue from one of “strategic defense” to one of “strategic offense.” That is, North Korea is now no longer in defensive mode regarding its nuclear weapons program but will take the initiative to use it to achieve its strategic goals. This has signaled that the goal of buying time in order to develop nuclear weapons has been fulfilled and the next task is to force the international community to accept it as a nuclear power. In this way, the pacification attitude of the concerned countries toward the issue of nuclear proliferation will completely transform into a concrete policy. The specific approach of North Korea is to exploit those countries that fear a showdown or war to engage in explicit high-profile publicity, brandish its nuclear capabilities, deprive these countries of excuses for making a choice and give them an ultimatum: accept the facts and recognize North Korea’s nuclear power status, or persist in their anti-nuclear proliferation stand, which means war. They must make a choice, without any further delay.

Consequences for the Six Parties

Undoubtedly, failure of the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula is absolutely detrimental to all countries and peoples, including the North Korean people. However, if we analyze the nuclearization of North Korea

from two aspects: process (North Korean nuclear crisis is still underway) and result (North Korea has already become a nuclear country), then we find that the degree of cost and benefit differs for each of the relevant parties.

First and foremost, the consequences of DPRK nuclearization have been detrimental in all respects for the North Korean people. By devoting colossal human, material and financial resources to the development of nuclear weapons, North Korea will definitely exacerbate the problems of its mired economy and poor living standards. An extra burden will come with the annual cost of safety maintenance of the nuclear weapons. In addition, the narrow Korean Peninsula is densely populated, with 70 million people living on 220 thousand square miles. This is a land intended for habitation, not testing atomic bombs. For instance, in such a heavily-populated area,

Japan would in one stroke become a nuclear power and a central force in a new East Asian military alliance.

where would North Korean citizens go in the event of a nuclear accident during a test? North Korea would certainly face stern condemnation and sanctions of the international community for its disregard of the universal opposition to nuclear weapons and become even more isolated in the world. Its economy would have no hope of recovery and the lives of its people would become even more difficult. In addition, nuclear weapons will not increase North Korea's security. Rather, they will put North Korea in an even more dangerous position. The United States may detest the present DPRK government but it would have no need to attack a non-nuclear North Korea. On the other hand, a nuclearized North Korea automatically upgrades the country as a target of U.S. nuclear attack and seriously raises the possibility of preemptive strike. With North Korea's relatively small territory and lack of 'strategic depth', maintaining a strategic force necessary for second-strike capability, and thereby providing mutual deterrence with the United States, is highly unlikely.

At the process level, the biggest winner (other than the North Korean government) is Japan. For a long time, the right wing in Japan has tried to revise the pacifist nature of its constitution and push the country toward rearmament. Although this has so far been blocked by opposition among the Japanese public, the North Korean missile launches and nuclear test have done the political right a big favor. The Japanese view of rearmament has

shifted as most now truly feel that Japan is being threatened by North Korea and that they have no choice but to strengthen its defense capabilities. Against such a background, the Japanese right wing is preparing a revision of the constitution to turn its Self Defense Force into a conventional military.⁴ Under the pretext of guarding against North Korean missiles, Japan has sharply increased its military spending, set up the missile defense system in cooperation with the United States, launched several reconnaissance satellites, expanded the maritime combat force, drawn up a strategy for a preemptive strike and strengthened the Japanese-American alliance, thereby accomplishing a long-held wish.⁵ Furthermore, according to Japanese media coverage dated May 22, 2005, a report from the U.S. Senate Republican Policy Committee claimed that if China continued its ambiguous policies on the North Korean nuclear issue then the United States would encourage Japan to become nuclearized and turn “Japanese nuclear weapons” against “North Korean nuclear weapons.”⁶ It would also organize an “alliance system” that included Taiwan, Australia, South Korea, Japan and other Southeast Asian countries and regions.⁷ In this way, Japan would in one stroke become a nuclear power and a central force in a new East Asian military alliance.

At the process level, the United States will roughly receive equal losses and benefits. The benefits include opportunities to adjust its military deployment by leveraging the North Korean nuclear crisis and strengthening its military presence in East Asia; curbing the centrifugal tendencies of South Korea and Japan and cementing its alliances with each country respectively; increasing military equipment sales in the region; reaping economic gains; and further isolating and punishing the DPRK to weaken the regime of Kim Jong Il. The losses are significant as well. By developing nuclear weapons, North Korea has challenged the authority of the NPT and broken the existing nuclear order, which may trigger a loss of control over nuclear proliferation and constitute a threat to the hegemonic interests of the United States. North Korea’s nuclear tests have also destabilized the regional security environment, which could lead to unknown negative consequences for American interests in East Asia.

At the process level, the losses for China far outweigh any gains. Since China is in strategic competition with the United States and Japan, their gains, as set out above, are China’s losses. To make matters worse, some of their losses are also losses for China. This latter category would include nuclear proliferation and the consequent instability in East Asia. In short, the losses for China are mainly manifested in a rapidly deteriorating regional security

environment. Furthermore, China is caught in a difficult bind. On the one hand, since a North Korea with nuclear weapons is not in China's interests or the common interests of humankind, as a responsible major power, China must take a clear stand of opposition. Otherwise, its international image and prestige will be severely tarnished. Even an ambiguous attitude will result in China being isolated and denounced by the international community. On the other hand, unequivocal opposition from China toward the DPRK is bound to cause vicious reprisal from North Korea, certainly leading to changes to Sino-DPRK relations. China is cornered diplomatically. Merely, the gains are that the North Korean nuclear issue will have temporarily occupied and restrained the United States and perhaps also that China will have added to its diplomatic credentials as mediator and participant in the Six Party Talks. China's losses are wide-ranging and permanent, while its gains are conditional, transient and full of risks.

If only the 'result' of the North Korean nuclear tests is observed and not the costs and benefits of the 'process' of their development then all are losers. Starkly put, the reality is that North Korea has come to own nuclear weapons without suffering mortal punishment. From a geopolitical perspective, Japan will be the primary target of North Korean nuclear weapons, exposing Japan to its gravest security threat since the end of World War II. Japan has no alternative but to intensify its theater missile defense plan, reinforce coastal defense, beef up its reconnaissance forces and develop its own nuclear weapons to form mutual deterrence.

In South Korea, some politicians privately believe that a North Korea with nuclear weapons is not necessarily a bad thing for the South, as these weapons will come into South Korea's possession when the two sides are reunited. This is erroneous thinking. With nuclear weapons in its hands, North Korea will be even more obstreperous regarding the contentious outstanding issues between the North and South. South Korea has no way to contend with the North's strong position. As a result of these developments, the balance of forces between the North and South will be even more skewed in the North's favor, resulting in South Korea becoming hostage to North Korea.

For the United States, the losses as a result of North Korean nuclear weapons capability are obvious. Although they will not constitute a direct threat to United States territory in the short term, Americans will live in constant fear if North Korea pursues nuclear proliferation by selling its nuclear technology, nuclear materials and even atomic bombs to the Middle East or terror-

ist groups. North Korea's successful crossing of the nuclear threshold will certainly have a demonstrative effect among the number of nations harboring nuclear ambitions, invariably leading to grave harm to international law and the existing nonproliferation system. As leader of the current international order, the United States' authority and power will be severely damaged.

From the perspective of the outcome of a nuclear North Korea, the biggest loser is, again, China. Similar to the United States and other countries, nuclear proliferation is also very bad for China, and will pressure Japan, South Korea and even Taiwan toward arming themselves with nuclear weapons, causing a dangerous nuclear arms race in East Asia. This would degrade China's security environment to an unprecedented level. The so-called "nuclear peace" as described by some scholars is unrealistic because nuclear proliferation on a wide scale will lead to a loss of control of the international security environment as the probability of irrational decision-making and the occurrence of nuclear accidents increase. To ensure the absolute safety of nuclear weapons and the

authority of the NPT, China will persist in its diplomatic policy of "opposing nuclear proliferation."

China is the biggest loser with a nuclear North Korea.

Second, North Korean possession of nuclear weapons may push China into a new security dilemma in Northeast Asia.

For a long time, in Chinese strategic thinking, the American military presence in Northeast Asia has been a latent threat to China's national security. Yet, it is because of the U.S. protective nuclear umbrella that Japan has exercised self-control in terms of developing nuclear weapons. But with North Korea's possession of nuclear weapons, only through U.S. military presence and nuclear deterrence in Northeast Asia will Japan (and possibly South Korea and Taiwan) possibly be dissuaded from developing nuclear weapons themselves in the foreseeable future. China would then be in a position of having to choose between two unfavorable alternatives: accepting Japan and South Korea with their own nuclear weapons or cementing a high-profile U.S. military presence in Northeast Asia.

Third, although North Korean nuclear weapons are not directed at China, no one can be sure how things may turn out in five or ten years. The lesson of Vietnam should not be forgotten. The political and economic center of China is on the eastern coastal areas, which are adjacent to North Korea. If, in the future, North Korea uses its nuclear weapons to threaten or blackmail China

or has a nuclear accident due to a loss or loss of control, the consequences for China will be dire.

Options for the International Community

Now that North Korea has conducted a nuclear test, the concerned nations must respond. Before any countermeasures are taken, however, an important judgment must be made that will strongly bear on the options ahead and the countermeasures to be taken: Is it possible for North Korea to retreat from its nuclear position? That is, can the Korean Peninsula return to a non-nuclear status?

If it is agreed that the North Korean nuclear issue is irreversible, the conclusion is naturally that we must accept the reality, admit that the previous efforts at denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula have failed and recognize North Korea as a nuclear country. Logically, what should be considered then is not how to eliminate North Korea's nuclear weapons, but how to coexist with a nuclear-armed North Korea. If North Korean nuclearization is judged to still be reversible, then concerned nations should continue to seek new methods to bring about denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula.

The first judgment is defeatist. Through a concerted effort, the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula can and must be resumed. The alternative will be too high a price for humanity. Therefore, the second judgment is the only option, and whether or not this ideal can be reached will be entirely dependent on human effort and imagination. This is why we need to advance the discussion.

Theoretically, there are a number of possible solutions to the North Korean nuclear issue. The first possibility is a peaceful solution based on negotiations. This would mean North Korea returning to the six-party talks to reach agreement through negotiation. In this scenario, North Korea would give up its nuclear weapons program for sufficient compensation that is also acceptable to the international community. Denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula would be realized through an implementation process, where the nuclear weapons, facilities and materials would be transported outside the country and destroyed. This is naturally the best solution, for it is a peaceful one and based on dialogue and mediation that entails the lowest cost, minimum of risk and would be an open process that can curtail any secret deal. On the one hand, the participation of multiple parties in a negotiation process increases the

chances for reaching agreement. However, they are also complex and drawn out, and would give North Korea more time to further strengthen its nuclear arsenal, which could have the opposite effect of undermining the talks.

The second possibility is a solution based on the use of force. Obviously, under this scenario, the six-party talks would be dead. The UN Security Council would pass a resolution to intensify sanctions against North Korea. During the act of enforcing it, an armed conflict led by the United States, and/or a multinational force, would break out by launching military strikes at North Korea, topple its existing regime and take control of its nuclear facilities, which are then transported abroad to be destroyed. Although the solution could instantly and thoroughly restore denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula, it may cause enormous loss of life and property resulting in a turbulent and chaotic security environment for years to come.

The third possibility is that the United States secretly interferes in the internal affairs of North Korea creating dramatic changes in the political situation. This method could quickly and thoroughly restore the non-nuclear status of the Korean Peninsula without triggering excessive turmoil or casualties. But, from the perspective of legal principles, this is not an aboveboard solution and could have serious consequences if the situation got out of control during implementation.

The fourth possibility is where the United States independently reaches a compromise with North Korea through a clandestine deal. This is an option the United States might resort to in order to punish China and Russia if they continued to resolutely oppose the wishes of the United States to use force against a North Korea -- with whom a negotiated deal through peaceful talks is considered very difficult. This would be a deal whereby North Korea promises not to pursue nuclear proliferation and, while the United States tolerates the nuclear status of North Korea, it would encourage Japan, South Korea and even Taiwan to develop nuclear weapons. For China, this is a worst case outcome.

China's Difficult Tradeoffs

In terms of the Korean Peninsula, China's core interests are two-fold: to realize the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula and ensure that North Korea remains a friendly neighbor. Therefore, a peacefully negotiated solution to the North Korea nuclear issue is naturally the optimal choice for China;

however, such a solution is highly dependent on North Korea's attitude. If the six-party platform resumes, what conditions will a nuclear North Korea raise during the talks? This is completely unknown by all. On Sept. 16, prior to the nuclear test, Kim Yong Nam, the number two figure in North Korea, indicated that "the preconditions for giving up its nuclear weapons is that neighboring countries should also discontinue their nuclear programs and that the big powers should realize nuclear disarmament."⁸ It can be inferred from his remarks that after returning to the six-party talks, North Korea is very likely to take nuclear disarmament of the big powers as a precondition for abandoning its own nuclear weapons. This will effectively render progress in the talks impossible.

If it is impossible to achieve the goal of a denuclearized Korean Peninsula, a force-based solution authorized by the Security Council seems the second-best option for China. Not only would such a solution instantly achieve the goal of a denuclearized peninsula, it could be under a unanimous decision of the Security Council member countries, which would be open and transparent and take into account the interests of all. But the North Korea nuclear issue is hard to measure purely from the angle of interests. The opposition to the use of force in solving disputes has always been a distinct feature of China's diplomacy, and it would be almost impossible to give up its habitual stance at a session of the Security Council in favor of a draft resolution that supports the use of force. Only after a major breakthrough in its own diplomatic policy would China be likely to support the Security Council in using force to solve the North Korea nuclear weapons issue.

The third possible solution to the North Korea nuclear issue is that the United States catalyzes a transformation of political power inside North Korea. Although it would achieve denuclearization, such a clandestine solution would involve many trade-offs that would not be brought into the open. Under such a scenario, it is very possible that with a presence in North Korea, the power of the United States would be significantly bolstered and bring even greater harm to Chinese interests. Some Western scholars speculate about whether China will meddle in the internal affairs of North Korea and support a pro-China faction. Such speculations are entirely groundless. First,

***The worst outcome for
China would be a
secret American-
North Korea deal.***

it is a fundamental diplomatic principle of China to not intervene in the internal affairs of other countries, let alone incite a coup in another country. Furthermore, there is no so-called “pro-China faction” in North Korea. What North Korea has established is an “exclusive ideological system.” As early as the 1950s, North Korea purged the influence of the “Yan’an faction.”⁹

However, for China, the worst outcome of the North Korean nuclear issue would be a secret American-North Korea deal. Such a solution could hinder both the goal of denuclearization and would not ensure that North Korea remains a friendly neighbor of China. Of course, such a situation depends highly on how North Korea and the United States judge each other and the necessity of major adjustments in their policies toward one another.

Conclusion

Since the North Korean nuclear test, the relationship between China and North Korea is no longer the same. First, a nuclearized North Korea will have a greater advantage in bilateral relations with China, and it will be difficult for China to anticipate, let alone influence, its next move. A nuclearized North Korea will bring countless problems to China’s politics and its diplomacy. Second, although the *Sino-Korean Treaty on Friendship, Cooperation and Mutual Assistance* contains provisions on a military alliance, China has no wish to be dragged into a war and will decide whether or not the provisions therein regarding military aid should be implemented based on the specific circumstances. Lastly, many Western scholars presume that China is unwilling to see North Korea collapse because it would have to deal with the issue of North Korean refugees. Although the refugee issue might have an impact on China, it is certainly not China’s main concern. China’s aim on the Peninsula will be to avoid a humanitarian disaster in North Korea. But the heavier burden of a flood of refugees resulting from collapse of the North would fall on South Korea rather than China. China has a vast territory and even millions of refugees would not have a huge impact on its economy. Besides, the international community would also help to mitigate the humanitarian consequences.

A nuclear North Korea has not only strained Sino-North Korean relations, but could also put to the test the Sino-American relationship. The Security Council Resolution 1718, adopted on Oct. 14, 2006, excludes military sanctions as an option, though it contains wordings like “in accordance with Chapter 7 of the U.N. Charter.” This was perhaps a necessary and wise compromise

made between all parties, but as such, it disqualifies UN sanctions as a viable standalone option for solving the North Korean nuclear issue. Those who understand the North Korean style of doing things know that no economic and political sanctions will suffice to bring North Korea back to the six-party talks, let alone give up its nuclear weapons. On the contrary, it will respond in an even more vehement manner. This is what they call “fighting fire with fire.” Therefore, following a period of implementation of Resolution 1718, little will change and the same old question will reemerge: accept North Korea as a nuclear country and bear the consequences, or persist in the non-nuclear state of the Korean Peninsula and take relevant measures. This choice must be made.

If further talks prove futile, China and the United States will certainly greatly differ as to whether the Security Council should try to resolve the North Korean nuclear issue through the use of force. China’s diplomatic stand has consistently been to oppose force as a basis for taking action against another country. This stance will be strongly challenged in the process of deciding what to do about North Korea. In addition, the following question will surely be posed: “Who should be held accountable for North Korea developing nuclear weapons?” The gap between the United States and China’s approaches and interests could turn the North Korean nuclear issue into a point of serious contention between the two countries. This is the last thing the Chinese want to see but both sides should be prepared, cracking this nut may be a long time in coming. 🍪

Notes

¹ Robert S. Norris, Hans M. Kristensen, “North Korea’s Nuclear Program 2005,” *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, vol. 61, no. 03, May/June 2005, pp. 64-67.

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⁶ "Anticipating a North Korean Nuclear Test: What's to Be Done to Avert Further Crisis," Policy Papers, U.S. Senate Republican Policy Committee, May 19, 2005. p.3. See: <http://www.senate.gov/~rpc/index.cfm>.

⁷ Ibid. p.4

⁸ "Kim Yong Nam Explains North Korean Standpoint of Solving the Nuclear Crisis," *Rodong Sinmun*, (the organ of the Korean Workers' Party Central Committee), Sept. 18, 2006. See: http://news.xinhuanet.com/world/2006-09/18/content_5104561.htm.

⁹ The "Yan'an faction" refers to the pro-china faction in the Korean Workers' Party (KWP). As early as the 1950s North Korea called for establishing "Kim Il-sung thought," which was the result of purging a number of other competing factions at the time including "South Faction" (南劳党派), the "Soviet Union Faction" (苏联派), and the "Yan'an Faction" (延安派). The demise of the Yan'an Faction meant both opposition to "serving the big" (反对自大, big refers to China's influence in North Korean history) and also achieving "self-defense" (自卫) in military affairs. Reference: Zhang Liangui, "The Unification of Korea Peninsular and China's Role," *Contemporary Asia-Pacific Studies*, Issue 5, 2004. See: <http://www.weachina.com/html/01695.htm>.

North Korea's Strategic Significance to China

Shen Dingli

Buffer Zone

From China's strategic perspective, Taiwan and North Korea are intrinsically linked.

China has claimed that its core national interests lie not just in economic development but also in national reunification.¹ In terms of economic relations, both China and the United States gain substantially from each other. In the security field, however, there is more competition and even rivalry between the two countries. This is especially pronounced with the issue of Taiwan – though the two countries are also cooperating to contain hardline pro-independence rhetoric. Beijing aspires to achieve reunification through peaceful means. However, certain U.S. actions, such as arms sales to Taiwan, can hardly be viewed as constructive on this issue and are inimical to China's security.

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North Korea, also known as the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) serves as China's strategic buffer zone in Northeast Asia. With a shared border of 1,400 kilometers, North Korea acts as a guard post for China, keeping at bay the tens of thousands of U.S. troops stationed in South Korea. This allows China to reduce its military deployment in Northeast

North Korea reduces the military pressure China faces from the United States in the contingency of Taiwanese independence.

China and focus more directly on the issue of Taiwanese independence. To a certain extent, North Korea shares the security threat posed by U.S. military forces in South Korea and Japan.

At present, North Korea has acquired certain nuclear capabilities through testing that has greatly irritated the United States, though not yet to the point of provoking it to use force. The United States has to main-

tain military pressure in the Korean Peninsula to prevent North Korea from taking pre-emptive action. However, the deterrent that North Korea's development of nuclear weapons obtains could further restrict the U.S. military's room to take action in the Korean Peninsula. The net effect of this also helps to contain the freedom of U.S. policy choices regarding Taiwan. Whether China needs it or not, this is North Korea's "contribution" to China's national security, and China is, therefore, unlikely to ignore its strategic value.

Cooperation and assistance between China and North Korea is, at a minimum, mutual. In fact, China merely provides North Korea with the means to survive, while North Korea acts as a bulwark against U.S. forces. How much has China spent on this arrangement? For approximately no more than a few billion dollars a year (as of late), China has been provided with more than 50 years of peace.² There is an argument that China has helped North Korea without getting anything in return.³ This statement is partially wrong. There is no altruism in international relations, including those between China and North Korea. By providing aid to North Korea, China is in essence helping itself. In this way, North Korea's resistance to American interference on the question of Taiwan and China's aiding North Korea are intertwined.

Conversely, North Korea may have its own view regarding this state of affairs. It may not be satisfied with the outcome of the original Korean War – a divided Korea – despite the best efforts of a Chinese Volunteer Force.

The DPRK may still bear a grudge over conducting the war on its own soil. When China provides aid to North Korea some would view this as buying security insurance at a basement bargain price. One could even interpret the China-North Korea alliance as being more important to China than the U.S.-Japan alliance is to the United States because the latter is largely asymmetrical in nature; that is, the security the United States has provided Japan was not equally reciprocated until roughly 10 years ago.⁴

A Northeast Asian Libya?

The antagonism between North Korea and the United States creates a complicated strategic situation for China. A North Korea with nuclear weapons deters aggression on the one hand, but can also potentially trigger destabilizing events on the other. For China, any destabilizing action runs counter to its interests of economic development. In addition, China needs to act in accordance with its role as a 'responsible stakeholder'. In this regard, China will work with the United States and other states to the six-party talks to dissuade North Korea from nuclear brinkmanship. Meanwhile, the U.S. push to sell weapons to Taiwan directly harms mainland China's national security. Even if China would not ask for it, a nuclear North Korea's ability to pin down U.S. forces in a Taiwan Strait contingency deters America's consideration of possible military intervention. Whether one likes it or not, this is the link between North Korea and Taiwan.

China must then ask itself: what kind of security situation it will face if one day North Korea signs a treaty with the United States, exchanges nuclear weapons for friendship, and, by doing so, follows in Libya's footsteps? It is not a trivial question. The question that is more fundamental than nuclear weapons development is what North Korea's orientation will be. If

China fails to handle the matter with deftness there is a real chance that North Korea will be cornered into provoking a war with the United States, a conflict that might eventually lead to North Korea's defeat. The latter scenario would be disastrous for China. If North Korea was defeated, the eventual outcome could lead to Japan, South Korea, North Korea and Taiwan (a part of China)

What kind of security situation will China face if one day North Korea signs a treaty with the United States, following in Libya's footsteps?

all aligning with the United States. In that case, China's security pressure regarding Taiwanese independence would be far more severe – a burden that would be hard to bear.

Naturally, if Taiwan does not declare independence and if China can eventually achieve reunification, the aforementioned complications are greatly reduced. But this process won't take place overnight. Therefore, the linkage between North Korea and Taiwan will remain, whether China needs it or not. The logical extension of this, as some perceive it, is that following the resolution of the Taiwan question, the possible strategic value that China held with North Korea and its nuclear arms would disappear. To an extent, this is reminiscent of the United States' dependence on China to counterbalance the Soviet Union, which ended after the Cold War. What such a scenario would mean for Chinese and Northeast Asian security is a more distant and complex issue and beyond the scope of this paper.

North Korea's Rationale

To understand the DPRK's nuclear calculus it is necessary to look at the situation in other countries with nuclear weapons, beginning with the United States. The United States began its nuclear weapons program spurred on by the existential threat of Nazi Germany's own development of an atomic bomb. Following the defeat of Germany, however, the United States did not give up nuclear weapons because it perceived newly emerging threats. At the same time, the United States accrued many other benefits from possessing nuclear weapons, including influence on allies through providing them with a security umbrella, as well as establishing its position as a superpower and thus dominating world affairs.

Since those early days, the United States has never relaxed its research on nuclear weapons. Currently, the American government is planning to conduct research on an enhanced "earth-penetrating nuclear warhead", a new nuclear weapon that was included in the 2006 defense research budget.⁵ This weapon, along with the "miniaturized nuclear warhead", which possesses an explosive force of a few kilotons or less, typifies the concept of "usable nuclear weapons" that the Bush administration has tried to develop.⁶

China has developed a limited nuclear weapons capability under the nuclear threat of the United States. So, when can China eliminate its nuclear weapons?

If someone were to call for the six-party talks to dismantle China's nuclear weapons with a promise not to invade China, would Beijing act based on the good faith promised by others? Would China be willing to destroy or even reduce its nuclear weapons while the United States keeps its arsenal? The answer is obvious.

Currently, there are four main countries in the world that remain outside the *Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons* (NPT). They are India, Pakistan, Israel and North Korea. Among them, North Korea joined the NPT but withdrew from it in early 2003; the three other countries never joined. The fundamental reason these four countries refuse to give up a nuclear weapons option lies in their consideration of national security. In addition, obtaining nuclear weapons helps to boost national morale is good for raising the prestige of the ruling party. This is also true for both the United States and the former Soviet Union.

It is thought that North Korea was wielding the political card when it announced it had nuclear weapons. But North Korea is not just playing politics; rather, it is seeking a security guarantor. Because of its distrust of the United States, North Korea's true aim is to possess nuclear weapons. If even a superpower such as the United States, for the sake of its own security, is not willing to give up nuclear weapons, how can one expect a weak country such as North Korea to do so? The greatest benefit nuclear weapons can offer a country is to deter a potential adversary from invading or threatening a nation's core interests. India, Pakistan, Israel and North Korea's aim in having nuclear weapons in the face of external pressures is to protect their own national security. For them, possessing nuclear weapons and the deterrence it provides always seems to be more reliable than giving up the development of nuclear weapons and exchanging them for uncertain or empty security assurances.

In fact, a more meaningful question is whether a country that is much weaker than the United States and possesses such an arsenal to compensate for a deficiency in conventional force would give up its nuclear weapons even if the United States took the lead in eliminating its own nuclear weapons. Again, the answer is self-evident. North Korea is developing

Because of its distrust of the United States, North Korea's true aim is to possess nuclear weapons.

nuclear weapons in response to the U.S. threat against it, which has been exacerbated by the American invasion of Iraq. Given the facts that in recent years the DPRK does not have an optimistic assessment of the security situation in its surrounding region, and that the United States itself is not willing to give up its own nuclear weapons, and that North Korea has invested 20 years or

North Korea's bold move to develop nuclear weapons is also to make war on the Korean Peninsula more unlikely.

more into developing its nuclear program, why would North Korea give up its nuclear weapons in exchange for a guarantee of no invasion, a basic commitment the United States is not even willing to provide?

The purpose of the six-party talks was to get North Korea to abandon its nuclear ambitions. During the talks, North Korea did express its intention to give up nuclear

weapons in exchange for other benefits.⁷ But in fact, it is unlikely that North Korea will ever give up its nuclear weapons. Judging by North Korea's current mentality, this doesn't seem to be the foremost among Pyongyang's options. As for why it once took part in the talks; first, it had no other choice early on since it had not yet obtained nuclear weapons capability. Second, it may have held out hope for real dialogue with the United States. However, the bottom line remained that it would acquire nuclear weapons. It may have even used the six-party talks to buy time to develop its nuclear weapons.

The North Korean nuclear issue was mainly ignited by the United States, but China is able to play only a minor role to resolve this issue for several reasons. First, China's efforts to host the multilateral talks pressured North Korea to abandon nuclear weapons while at the same time undercuts Pyongyang's chance to negotiate directly with Washington. As a result, North Korea may perceive China as unfriendly if not a saboteur of its core national interests.

Second, Beijing's security relationship between China and North Korea is not one-sided. China provides security to North Korea, but North Korea also affords China with a measure of security, and it is unlikely that China will risk it by pressuring North Korea too much. When the United States threatens other countries (just as it did China, prompting China to develop nuclear weapons), it seems unreasonable that it then demand other countries impose sanctions on the threatened country. Should any substantial sanctions be imposed, they should be done by the United States.

Given that it is virtually impossible to fundamentally improve the North Korea-U.S. relations while President Bush is in office, North Korea can only concentrate on improving its nuclear weapon development at this time and postpone the goal of rapprochement for a new administration. When North Korea regains acceptance in the international community, it is likely to open up economic cooperation with the rest of the world. Therefore, nuclear tests end up being the key to opening North Korea's development.

In addition to considerations of strengthening national security, the nuclear option helps alleviate the massive input of resources required for conventional weaponry and shift them to economic development. This is also the road that other nuclear weapons states such as the United States and China have taken. Though in the initial stages of nuclear development a significant outlay is necessary, North Korea has made this investment and can now reap economic benefits of its nuclear effort.

North Korea's bold move to develop nuclear weapons also makes war on the Korean Peninsula more unlikely. Given nuclear weapons capability, the possibility that war will break out on the Peninsula is slim because of a number of deterrent factors. The United States has 90,000 servicemen stationed in East Asia and the Pacific Region, with more than 30,000 of them in South Korea. This puts the U.S. Army in a disadvantageous position vis-à-vis North Korea, which maintains one of the largest active military forces in the world, including a regular army of 1 million and up to 6 million reserves.⁸ As for conventional weaponry, North Korea has sufficient artillery and short-range missiles to cause massive casualties to the U.S. forces in South Korea. This arsenal might also constitute a significant deterrent to South Korea. But nuclear weapons constitute an additional deterrent, aimed at making the United States take North Korea more seriously. If the United States takes pre-emptive action it cannot ensure success without heavy cost. On the contrary, it would sink into another quagmire of a messy war. The balance of troops between North Korea and the United States as well as the destructive force of nuclear weapons simply makes it hard for the United States to take military action against North Korea.

Boundaries of Sino-DPRK Relations

There is also an important factor related to the Sino-DPRK dynamic in North Korea's decision to develop nuclear weapons. China is now much bet-

ter off since its opening up, yet North Korea barely survives. China appears uninterested in sustaining Article II of its Treaty with North Korea signed in 1961, which assures mutual military assistance in the case of aggression by a third party against either one of them.⁹ The United States has a security alliance with Japan and a *Taiwan Relations Act* concerning Taiwan, providing sufficient security guarantees to both. Comparing the U.S. security arrangement with

Comparing the U.S. security arrangement with its partners in East Asia, what China has provided to North Korea lately is far less in terms of a military commitment.

its partners in East Asia, what China has provided to North Korea lately is far less in terms of a military commitment. In light of the current environment, it is likely that the DPRK won't feel very secure under this treaty relationship with China.

North Korea may judge China to be in a state of indecision regarding its priorities. On the one hand, the nuclear testing by the DPRK could give rise to serious considerations of regional nuclear proliferation and regional tensions and instability. However,

North Korea may have concluded that China is more concerned about preventing a regime change in North Korea, thus ensuring the stability of the Korean Peninsula, and less concerned about non-proliferation. As a result, China may be forced to accept North Korea's nuclear test. In addition, North Korea may calculate that not every country is willing to follow the United States. At the United Nations Security Council, although China and Russia have expressed dissatisfaction with the nuclear testing, substantive and comprehensive sanctions against North Korea simply do not accord with their fundamental interests and are definitely not a policy option for them or for other countries.¹⁰ To demonstrate that they are responsible powers, China and Russia have agreed to limited sanctions but have not accepted comprehensive sanctions, let alone cutthroat economic measures against North Korea.

China and North Korea used to carry the responsibility of a "blood-bound alliance." This allied cooperation seems to have greatly dissipated, though not abolished under international law. An attack launched by North Korea on South Korea or the United States, regardless of whether North Korea has nuclear weapons, would not fall within the scope of mutual assistance required under the China-North Korea Treaty. But if North Korea comes under a pre-

emptive strike by the United States as a result of having developed nuclear weapons, China would then be obligated to assist its partner, as interpreted by the terms of that bilateral Treaty, if it is still effective. Otherwise, China would lose the trust of North Korea and the world and, therefore, would seriously harm its international credibility.

In all of this, North Korea has greater vested interests than China does. This fact made it extremely difficult for China to stop North Korea's first nuclear test, just as it failed to prevent North Korea from conducting missile tests in August, 2006. Whether or not the DPRK conducts nuclear tests is ultimately Pyongyang's decision, not China's. What's more, North Korea still has strategic value to Beijing given the potential headache of Taiwanese independence, and therefore a "regime change" in North Korea looks unacceptable to China. Even though North Korea has conducted a nuclear test it is still a security partner – albeit a difficult one – of China. China needs North Korea, and North Korea understands this.

In the short term, a North Korea with nuclear weapons would not pose a direct threat to China because China has not threatened North Korea. Rather, the problem is the responses that North Korea elicits from Japan and South Korea. Yet it is reasonable to ask what the long-term impact of a nuclear weapons-capable North Korea will have on China and the region. The possibility that China's future relations with North Korea or a reunified Korea would include the element of nuclear weapon diplomacy cannot be excluded, especially given the border dispute between the two countries. North Korea is developing nuclear weapons based on a threat by the United States, but the weapons can be used for other purposes, as well. If China is one day perceived as a threat, the DPRK's nuclear arms could vastly complicate China's handling of its relations with the North. In the final analysis, China needs to maintain normal and friendly relations with North Korea.

Managing a Nuclear North Korea

United States

By testing nuclear weapons, North Korea is bound to meet resolute opposition from the United States because it has now breached one of the two "red lines" set by the United States regarding the nuclear issue on the Korean Peninsula – nuclear testing and the exportation of nuclear weapons or nuclear

weapons technology. However, the United States has no effective means to punish the DPRK for having tested a nuclear weapons device. The United States currently doesn't seem to have the political option of taking military action against North Korea,¹¹ nor does it have substantive economic ties with North Korea, precluding a viable course of action through direct economic sanctions.¹² The United States can, at most, request of its allies and UN member states that have economic relations with the DPRK to use their leverage. In reality then, the United States now has only one remaining bottom line: that North Korea does not proliferate nuclear weapons, and in essence, that it becomes a responsible *de facto* nuclear country – a requirement the United States has of China, India and Pakistan.

In fact, issues regarding the proliferation of nuclear weapons are themselves controversial. Historically, nuclear weapons research began in Nazi Germany and the atom bomb was first acquired by the United States. Today eight countries have declared they have nuclear weapons. From one perspective, a consequence of this has been a decrease in the danger of large-scale war, so to a certain extent, nuclear weapons have stabilized relations between major powers, such as between China and the United States. The real concerns regarding the spread of nuclear weapons are accidental and unauthorized launch, as well as such weapons falling into the hands of irresponsible actors.

As for Northeast Asia, China considers its possession of nuclear weapons as increasing the stability and security of the region, rather than destroying the peace. China doesn't intend to threaten other countries with its nuclear

The United States now has only one remaining bottom line: that North Korea does not proliferate nuclear weapons.

weapons, yet its nuclear weapons have served to deter aggression by the United States to some extent. The question follows, then, whether it is logical that China's nuclear weapons are stabilizing while nuclear weapons of other states may be destabilizing. Clearly, this assumption is not necessarily correct. The truth is that no nation should threaten another in the first place, but when coercion has occurred, the logic of proliferation will ensue, and given

certain international dynamics, the one that initiates the threat has to accept the reality of proliferation. This is what happened when the United States

threatened China and eventually had to accept China's response of developing its own atomic bomb. Most Chinese believe that without China's nuclear weapons, the United States would take China less seriously.

Under the reality of international politics, once China, India and Pakistan acquired nuclear weapons as a result of their respective security concerns, the world became pragmatic about the situation. They are certainly expected to be responsible by working to assure the safety and security systems of the weapons and not to transfer either the weapons or related knowledge and capabilities outside their borders. For example, the United States has long complained of China's record regarding nuclear and missile exports to Pakistan. Yet, through great effort, China has built up a legal system of export control in cooperation with other countries.¹³ As a result, today China is credited with handling such affairs with far more caution and experience.

Without a chance to improve relations with America, Pyongyang will continue to develop its nuclear force.

Regarding North Korea, it is reasonable to ask whether the country will be a responsible actor in handling nuclear technology. Indeed the DPRK has shipped missiles to Yemen and possibly other countries.¹⁴ Would North Korea proliferate nuclear weapons? The possibility certainly exists, but one cannot conclude that the DPRK will proliferate because it is under a repressive political system. When China obtained nuclear weapons in the 1960s its government was also regarded by Western countries as a dictatorship. Yet, China did not threaten to sell them or use them, except as a deterrent force for ensuring national security.

Without a chance to improve relations with the United States, which is viewed by Pyongyang as threatening its national security, North Korea will continue to develop its nuclear force. With its uranium mines, North Korea can be self-sufficient in building a closed fuel-cycle for a nuclear arsenal. While it may not yet have a sufficient nuclear deterrent, as few as 10-20 nuclear warheads would surely force the United States to accept it and deal with North Korea as a *de facto* nuclear nation.

As long as North Korea becomes and remains a responsible nuclear nation, i.e., it does not threaten other countries with nuclear weapons or participate in their proliferation, aid or abet terrorists, engage in money laundering or drug

trafficking then it is bound to achieve normal relations with the United States. North Korea could expect that after it has made sufficient breakthroughs in nuclear weapons development and after withstanding international pressure for a certain period of time, it will eventually return to the international community.

This opportunity will not likely come until the term of the next U.S. president. On the whole, before North Korea acquired nuclear weapons, the core of its conflict with the United States lay in their development. But now that it has obtained them, its nuclear weapons capability will become the bargaining chip to obtain strategic status from the United States, as well as the key to attaining strategic understanding from the United States. By then, proliferation to other countries will become the core issue in DPRK-U.S. relations.

China and Northeast Asia

While accepting sanctions on North Korea for its nuclear test, concerned countries in Northeast Asia must be careful not to push North Korea into a corner, forcing it to take pre-emptive action. Therefore, room for compromise needs to be preserved so that North Korea is prompted to exercise self-restraint and not continue its nuclear testing.¹⁵ However, this is still a retreat from the six-party talks, which required North Korea to give up its pursuit of nuclear weapons. Even if North Korea makes a tactical retreat, it probably would not halt the overall development of its nuclear weapons program. On the contrary, it could regard the international community as having accepted its position as a new nuclear power. These are the contradictions that must be faced.

As for China, even if it did impose economic sanctions, the total of its affected aid would not be more than few billion U.S. dollars.¹⁶ This is actually a small amount for North Korea's population of 23 million and will not be sufficient to fundamentally alter its economic situation. There are also lessons from China's own past that it would do well to remember. For instance, when the Soviet Union withdrew its aid following the Sino-Soviet ideological split, not only did China virtually disregard all of the past assistance provided by the Soviet Union, but it also bore a grudge for a long time afterward.¹⁷ In similar fashion, China has not expressed much appreciation for the aid provided by Japan during the past two decades, but has rather showed great contempt for Japan when it threatened to dramatically reduce that aid. Therefore, if China

discontinues aid to North Korea, the reaction by the DPRK will likely be the same.

North Korea has issued a statement guaranteeing that it will be a responsible nuclear country and that it will not strike first with nuclear weapons or proliferate them.¹⁸ If this is true, their possession by North Korea should be less of a stimulus for Japan or South Korea to develop nuclear weapons. Nevertheless, it will certainly affect the alliances between the United States and Japan as well as between the United States and South Korea.

In the face of North Korea's nuclear test, Japan and South Korea have two options: develop their own nuclear weapons or strengthen their alliances with the United States without developing their own nuclear weapons. They are more likely to choose the latter option, relying to a greater degree on the U.S. nuclear umbrella and missile defense system rather than developing their own nuclear weapons, a move that would provoke the United States itself and many other countries. In Japan, there has been some debate on the future of its nuclear path with some officials suggesting a review of the country's three "no" principles on nuclear weapons.¹⁹ But these have been suppressed by the United States' reaffirmation of extended deterrence. For South Korea, the course of "localizing" and limiting its forces in the joint combat system with the United States could slow down or even be reversed if the situation deteriorates. Whatever the strategic decisions by Japan and South Korea in response to North Korean nuclear tests, China will have little influence over them.

On the other hand, bilateral relations between China and South Korea are deepening because of the North Korea issue. Both are opposed to North Korea's military nuclear program and would opt for a peaceful settlement. This is a major positive force within the six-party talks.

Farther afield, North Korea's nuclear tests will undoubtedly encourage Iran. The DPRK nuclear model – resisting pressure and gaining recognition – could embolden Tehran. It is becoming increasingly apparent that the United States is mired in Iraq and Afghanistan and will not attack Iran or

While accepting sanctions on North Korea for its nuclear test, other countries must be careful not to push North Korea into a corner.

North Korea anytime soon. Withdrawing now will cause Iraq to become the world's most dangerous breeding ground for terrorism. If a decision is made to attack Iran, it would be the quickest way to undermine the United States as a first-class superpower.

The war on terror has in effect lowered China's place on America's list of perceived threats. This has served as an opportunity for China's peaceful development as the United States must show goodwill toward Beijing on the issue of Taiwan. To successfully pursue its development goals, China has persisted in commanding a stable and smooth course without making any mistakes. In the meantime, the United States has made major mistakes as of late, many of which will be difficult to reverse. Launching a strike against Iran or North Korea would be one more blunder that will push the United States further into decline. ☹️

Notes

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⁸ Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs of the U.S. State Department: “Background Notes: North Korea,” Oct., 2006. See: <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/2792.htm>.

⁹ Shen Jiru, “An Urgent Matter in Order to Maintain Security in Northeast Asia – How to Stop the Dangerous Games in the DPRK’s Nuclear Crisis,” *World Economics and Politics*, Sept. 2003.

¹⁰ Indeed, the UNSCR 1718 imposed very light sanctions: It disallowed luxuries and heavy armament to flow into North Korea and forbade North Korea’s weapons of mass destruction leaders to visit abroad, It also demanded a freeze on North Korea’s WMD account overseas and a cargo search, as well. This resolution was nearly exclusively restricted to missile and WMD items. However, it did not ask for economic or financial sanctions. The Japanese government, indeed, imposed unilateral sanctions, banning North Korea’s ships from visiting Japan. But it did not ban the flow of financial remittance from Japan to North Korea. It also didn’t ban the trade between the two countries on the high seas. See Resolution 1718 at <http://daccessdds.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N06/572/07/PDF/N0657207.pdf?OpenElement>.

¹¹ To force a regime change in Pyongyang through military action would have cost some \$1 trillion during the Bill Clinton administration. Given the DPRK’s subsequent development of nuclear weapons, the cost will certainly be far higher. Richard N. Haas, “Regime Change and Its Limits,” *Foreign Affairs*, July/August 2005.

¹² Susan E. Rice, "We Need to Talk to North Korea", *The Washington Post*, June 3, 2005.

¹³ "China Establishes Legal System for Non-proliferation Export Control: White Paper," *People's Daily Online*, Dec., 27, 2004.

¹⁴ "Country Overviews: North Korea: Missile Import/Export," *Nuclear Threat Initiative*, Updated July 2003. See: http://www.nti.org/e_research/profiles/NK/Missile/66_1279.html.

¹⁵ The DPRK promised to a high-level Chinese delegation visiting Pyongyang after the first nuclear test that "it will not conduct a second test." See: "DPRK Says it has Conducted Underground Nuclear Test," *Xinhua News Agency*, Oct. 9, 2006. See: http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2006-10/09/content_5180500.htm.

¹⁶ "China's Top Legislator Meets DPRK Premier," *Xinhua News Agency*, Oct. 30, 2003; Michael Chambers, "Managing a Truculent Ally: China and North Korea, 2003," unpublished manuscript, Fairbank Institute, Harvard University, Feb. 23, 2004.

¹⁷ "The Sino-Soviet Conflict and the Crisis of the International Communist Movement," *International Socialist Review*, New York, Vol. 27, No. 2, Spring 1966, pp. 76-85.

¹⁸ On Oct. 5, 2006, the DPRK's Ministry of Foreign Affairs issued a statement to announce that it was going to conduct a nuclear test. It declared that "The DPRK will never use nuclear weapons first and will strictly prohibit the threat with and export of nuclear weapons."

"China Says N. Korea Not Planning Test," *Associated Press*, Oct. 25, 2006. See: <http://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory?id=2602564&CMP=OTC-RSSFeeds0312>.

¹⁹ "Japanese PM Pledges to Maintain No-nuclear-arms Policy," *People's Daily Online*, Aug. 6, 2002. See: http://english.people.com.cn/200208/06/eng20020806_101011.shtml.

Shifting Tides: China and North Korea

Zhu Feng

The decision by Kim Jong Il's regime to test launch missiles on July 5 and to test a nuclear device on Oct. 9, 2006, dramatically impacted China's foreign policy toward North Korea. These incidents have served to undermine the six-party talks hosted by China and threaten to further exacerbate the forces destabilizing regional security in Northeast Asia. Pyongyang's defiance of China's stern warnings regarding these tests has finally signaled to Beijing that the "North Korea crisis" is catastrophically deteriorating.

Following both the missile and nuclear tests, China voted in favor of UN Security Council Resolutions 1695, 1705 and 1718, clearly indicating that Beijing is seeking new policies to deal with North Korea. There remains a degree of internal discussion on what that policy direction should be and the nature China's relations to the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK). For a variety of reasons, a residual sympathy for North Korea remains in China that is preventing a showdown between Beijing and Pyongyang. Yet China is

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decisively working to expand its cooperation with the international community to force North Korea to discontinue its pursuit of nuclear weapons and lower the threat arising from its weapons of mass destruction. Furthermore, if China's own complex domestic and international cost-benefit calculus can be untangled, a significant shift in Beijing's policy – entailing abandonment of its patron relationship with North Korea and coercion to roll back nuclear capabilities – may be just around the corner.

Missile Tests: A Turning Point

The DPRK's last three missile tests conducted since the outbreak of the North Korean nuclear crisis in October 2002 had limited diplomatic impact mainly because the test launches involved only short-range or shore-based anti-ship missiles.¹ Since North Korea already possessed such missile capabilities there was no evidence that North Korean missile technology had improved substantively since the Taepodong-1 was test fired in 1998. However, when intelligence confirmed that North Korea was going to test-fire long-range missiles in June 2006 capable of reaching the west coast of the United States the reactions of the United States and Japan fundamentally changed. These tests were also significant because they damaged Beijing's credibility as a mediator and decreased its presumed influence on North Korea.

Following the long-range missile tests on July 5, 2006, an intense debate arose in the United States regarding the possibility of using a preemptive strike on North Korean missile facilities. Although the possibility of such a strike was ultimately ruled out by the White House, the United States announced that the missile defense system in Alaska would enter a higher alert level. In addition, the United States and Japan decided to step up deployment of missile defenses in Japan, and the United States sent its only Aegis cruiser equipped with a marine missile defense system into the offshore waters of North Korea. All these moves point to a marked escalation of the military confrontation revolving around the North Korean missile launch – a situation China had been working to avoid with its mediation efforts in the North Korean nuclear crisis and by hosting the six-party talks.

The possibility of North Korea's long range missile tests did not at first draw a particularly swift or strong response from Beijing as it has grown accustomed to such tactics of intimidation so often employed by the DPRK whenever the six-party talks stagnate. It was difficult to tell whether this par-

ticular test-launch of missiles by North Korea was yet another bluff in order to pressure the United States to lift the financial sanction against it.

China's reaction began to change, however, with the continuous string of reports regarding the imminent tests that were published in June of 2006. For the first time, the Chinese premier openly demanded North Korea to halt its erroneous action. On June 28, 2006, Chinese premier Wen Jiabao openly called on North Korea to stop the test launch in an attempt to avoid Chinese domestic alarm at growing tensions in the Sino-DPRK relationship.² This reaction was unprecedented as China's senior leaders had never officially demanded anything of the DPRK, even when it withdrew from the nuclear *Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons*, or reopened its 5-megawatt graphite reactor or when it declared possession of nuclear weapons in February 2005.

The reasons for China's change of position are numerous. First, it is important to note that the Chinese leadership's direct

call for a halt on the missile testing came after South Korea's explicit request to China through official channels to prevent Pyongyang from carrying out the test launch. Since the second round of six-party talks on the North Korean nuclear issue in February 2004, China and South Korea have been moving ever closer in their approach and coordination of policies. Considering South Korea's deep concern over the test launch, its direct request for Beijing to take action against this provocative move by the DPRK was a request that China could not decline.

Secondly, Beijing had become painfully aware of the significance of North Korea's test of a long-range missile (the Taepodong-2). This would be an open provocation by Pyongyang, after which China would have little reason to further cushion the DPRK from the United States and Japan. Prior to this, Beijing had been hoping to "comfort" North Korea through softening the "pressure and isolation" policy adopted by the United States and Japan and protect North Korea from any further setback and harm. With Japan's extreme sensitivity to Pyongyang's missile test launching, the firing of the new Taepodong-2 missile would only provide a pretext for Japan to accelerate its cooperation with Washington in developing ballistic missile defense, enhance the U.S.-Japan military alliance and promote Japan's plan to intensify

The Chinese premier demanded for the first time that North Korea halt its erroneous action.

its military development plan. These developments would in turn complicate China's Japan policy considerably. Due to the current tension in Sino-Japanese relations, any moves by Japan's military have the potential of stirring domestic nationalism in China that runs high with anti-Japanese sentiments. These changes in China's security environment would provide a basis for the Chinese military to demand a bigger budget and scale up military forces. The Chinese leadership headed by Hu Jintao (China's President) does not want to see the escalation of military confrontation between China and other big powers in the region, nor does it want China's defense strategy to be manipulated by the internal nationalist passions.

North Korea's missile tests have diverse implications for China. First, the missile tests show that Pyongyang has little regard for China's own security interests. Beijing is deeply frustrated by the intransigent behavior and thinking of Pyongyang despite five rounds of six-party talks and the signing of the Joint Statement in September 2005. China had hoped that it could influence North Korea through a multilateral mechanism to create – and make routine – an

The missile tests shook the Chinese leadership's belief in the Kim Jong Il regime's ability to carry out reform in emulation of China's model.

exchange acceptable both to North Korea and the other parties. China's strategy in attaining these goals can be characterized as a "soft approach," aiming to arrive at a diplomatic solution, gradually but concretely affecting North Korea's actions. China, time and again, sternly rejected calls by the United States to increase pressure on Pyongyang and even took various actions to protect North Korea from further

isolation. At the same time, China teamed up with South Korea, continuously providing North Korea with substantial aid, supporting South Korea's "peace and prosperity policy" toward North Korea and respecting the requirements of Kim for a "security assurance" and "fair treatment". The quid pro quo of such an approach, however, was the willingness by North Korea to fully cooperate with China and South Korea, to give up its brinkmanship behavior and respect China's role as host of the six-party talks. The launching of the missiles shows undeniably that Pyongyang not only lacks a basic appreciation of China's painstaking efforts on its behalf, but contempt for China's security interests in Northeast Asia.

The missile tests also deeply shook the Chinese leadership's belief in the Kim Jong Il regime's ability to carry out reform and opening up in emulation of China's model. The Chinese people also hold highly negative views of the Pyongyang regime. A recent public opinion poll shows that 44 percent of Chinese people dislike North Korea more than any other country (closely following Japan, which 56 percent of people polled most disliked). Conversely, among the three East Asian nations, South Korea is considered by the Chinese public as the country that China most needs to deepen bilateral relations (48 percent), followed by Japan (40 percent), and North Korea a distant last (12 percent).³

The Chinese leadership now understands it may have deluded itself about the Kim government. Beijing has pursued a good neighborly policy with North Korea, thinking that Pyongyang would gradually be won over by China's kindness. However, the missile tests have finally revealed to the leadership in Beijing the true nature of the Kim government. North Korea's nuclear ambitions stem in large part from the need to safeguard the regime's own security and interests rather than its country and people. It has also shown itself to be highly skilled in its resistance to internal reform.⁴ Pyongyang has refused to accept China's advice and continues to take measures that intensifies confrontation and defies the international community. This can only mean that the current mentality of DPRK leaders is simplistic and arrogant. Pyongyang will not in the end give serious consideration or cater to the interests of China or take decisive steps on the road of reform and opening. Beijing now objectively concedes that it is fantasy to expect the Kim government to make wise decisions and restart the process of merging itself into the world community.

The nuclear test was no less than a slap in China's face.

Soon after the missile tests of July 5, 2006, China voted in favor of UN Security Council Resolution 1695 (which condemned DPRK's missile launches and imposed limited sanctions on North Korea), clearly indicating the most significant change of China's policy toward North Korea in recent years. It signifies China's growing resentment toward North Korea and implies an end to China's "umbrella" policy for North Korea, a policy that has been in effect since the end of the Cold War and meant to prevent the UN Security Council from getting entangled in North Korean affairs, and protect North

Korea from UN sanctions. With North Korea's deep dependence on China's economic and diplomatic assistance, anything that causes China to distance itself from Pyongyang will no doubt have implications for the survival of the Kim government. From Pyongyang's perspective, Beijing's support of the resolution was an act of treachery by its socialist big brother. China's refusal to continue as North Korea's 'protector' in the Security Council opens the door for the possibility of new, tougher UN sanctions.

The Nuclear Equation: A New Era

China's ire over North Korea's missile test had not yet subsided when the DPRK decided to test a nuclear bomb on Oct. 9, 2006. In Beijing, ire turned into fury. Pyongyang's nuclear test was a reckless violation of the September 2005 Joint Statement and squandered Beijing's good will policy to accommodate Pyongyang in their legitimate pursuit of security guarantees and national interests demands. It was no less than a slap in China's face. The test shows that Pyongyang has been genuinely indifferent to China's continuous opposition and warnings against the DPRK's pursuit of nuclear weapons. There is little doubt that the North Koreans consider their nuclear capability more important than their friendship with its only patron state, China. Without question,

Beijing has become fully disillusioned about the nature of the Kim government, and has come to recognize that its previous nuclear appeasement policy for the North must come to an end.

There is a range of speculation as to why Kim risked jettisoning China's long-term support in favor of going nuclear. Some in China argue that Kim did not believe that Beijing would truly punish him by cutting

Following the nuclear test, the traditionally defined 'friendship' between the two countries has evaporated.

off oil and other provisions. Certainly, Pyongyang is convinced that an anti-American North Korea has been a valuable strategic buffer for China vis-à-vis the United States' military presence in East Asia. Kim likely calculated that China would never abandon him for this reason. Others contend that Kim and his diplomats frequently hint to China that Pongyang will do an about-face and embrace the United States if China pushes too hard. In this way, Pyongyang probably believes it holds a 'trump card' over Beijing by playing

such cat and mouse tricks. His gamble has proved him wrong. Following the nuclear test, the traditionally defined ‘friendship’ between the two countries has evaporated. Even though Beijing did not fully flex its muscle against the DPRK, the reality is that Chinese leaders’ resolve to dismantle the North Korean nuclear program has intensified. Beijing’s harsh words of protest on the nuclear test fully reinforce this. China called Pyongyang’s action “flagrant” (悞然), a word that is normally employed only for criticizing actions by an adversary, a clear break from past language by the Chinese leadership, and a lucid expression of dissatisfaction and even resentment toward Kim.

A Japan rearmed with nuclear weapons is entirely unacceptable to China.

China’s interest in preventing North Korea from developing nuclear weapons is fundamentally not different from Japan and the United States. Although Beijing is not willing to speak with one voice alongside Tokyo and Washington in public statements and therefore its opposition and threats toward North Korea are watered down to some extent, a North Korea with nuclear weapons is unacceptable to China.

Of primary concern, in Beijing’s judgment, is that the DPRK’s nuclear test has decisively shifted the nature of the problem from the ‘North Korean nuclear issue,’ which has revolved around concerns over nuclear proliferation, to the far more dangerous and broad ‘North Korean issue.’ China has long tried to limit its approach with North Korea to the nuclear issue rather than the comprehensive problems – regime legitimacy, its refusal to end the Cold War on the Korea Peninsula and integrating itself into the regional community, unpredictability of its behavior – fearing negative influence on Sino-North Korean relations and a destabilization of the DPRK regime itself.

If North Korea fully develops and possesses nuclear weapons then fissures in the geopolitical landscape of East Asia will emerge. In the long run, this will negatively affect China’s strategic interests. First of all, since the brunt of dealing with a nuclear North Korea in the region will primarily fall to China and South Korea they will have to strengthen their coordination efforts to this end. China simply cannot shoulder the burden alone. A closer China-South Korean cooperation could alert Japan and further drive the U.S.-Japanese military alliance. On the other hand, North Korea’s nuclear tests will also cause Japan to accelerate its conventional military buildup as well as reopen

the debate in Japan on its pursuit of nuclear weapons. This will instigate a backlash in China and South Korea, further aligning the two countries while driving a bigger wedge between them and Japan. A Japan rearmed with nuclear weapons is entirely unacceptable to China, but may be welcome to the United States. This divergence of interests will lead to increased divisions between

One great uncertainty is what future orientation North Korea will take.

China-South Korea on the one side and the United States and Japan on the other – a separation between continent states versus sea powers.

A nuclear North Korea will have its greatest direct impact on the relationship

between Japan and China and each country's domestic reactions to developments. The problem of North Korea is a double-edged sword and has the potential of either promoting or seriously harming Sino-Japanese relations. Naturally, China's hope is that the North Korea problem will become the lubricant for better communication between the two countries. It could be a catalyst for greater discourse over regional security and cooperation. This environment probably won't lead to breakthroughs on the historical issues, but may be a beginning in bringing the two closer. On the other hand, there is a real danger for a worsening of Sino-Japanese ties if a spirit of cooperation is lacking; Japan's tough stand toward North Korea unsettles China because Japan also has strong nationalist sentiments against China, which will inevitably instigate similar nationalist response from China, further engendering hostility toward one another.

As for China and the United States, while the recent events are an important factor between them, their relationship also has a dynamic that is substantially independent of the North Korean issue. There is no question that American policy towards North Korea has been a failure and conservatives and moderates in the United States continue to be divided over China's role in the North Korean nuclear issue. As serious as it is, the side effects in solving this problem will not hugely impact the Sino-U.S. relationship in the near and medium term. Nevertheless, in this context, there are many uncertainties for China's national security if force is used to resolve the North Korean nuclear issue. One great uncertainty is what orientation North Korea will take. In the past 40 years, resistance against America was the basis of Sino-North Korean friendship. But in 1992, by establishing diplomatic relations with South Korea, China sent a clear message that it would not support North Korea's extreme

anti-American stance. This action by China was regarded by North Korea as a betrayal and its distrust still factors in Pyongyang's thoughts. If China uses force to dissuade North Korean nuclear aspirations it is possible China would not only 'lose' North Korea but the country could become anti-Chinese in nature. Most Chinese policymakers are loathe to see this happen. Another uncertainty comes from America's future military presence in the Korean Peninsula. Will it decrease or increase? If China and the United States can come to a consensus on North Korea, a future North Korean regime would at least not be hostile to China, alleviating one of China's principal concerns.

Most critical from Beijing's perspective is to confirm whether and to what extent the United States will commit to collaborating with China in firmly yet constructively rolling-back North Korea's nuclear program. Until this point, Beijing has not received sufficiently clear signals from Washington on its real intention to dismantle the DPRK's nuclear capability. That confirmation and trust notably revolves around America's resolve to settle the issue as well as its willingness to share in the costs and responsibilities of any lasting solution. One of Beijing's greatest fears is that if China was at the forefront of any confrontation with the DPRK, the United States would back down and Beijing would be caught flatfooted to deal with North Korea alone. Beijing and Washington may be trapped in a dilemma where each side is unwilling to get too close to one another and act together decisively to deal with North Korea due to the logic of great power politics.

The greatest casualty of North Korea's nuclear tests has been the six-party talks.

Perhaps the greatest casualty of North Korea's nuclear tests has been the six-party talks. Some in the United States have wanted to kick-start such a mechanism with China at the helm. However, this was always a false hope. It was never going to be realized in the medium- or near-term without strong buttressing by others, especially the United States. As a regional security coordination mechanism, China has been carefully examining the six-party talks and their potential. However, the reality is that a regional security structure evolving from the six-party talks is not something China can do by relying on its own strength, nor is it a mechanism in China's interests. It is not practical and is therefore no longer a policy priority for China.

President George W. Bush has said the six-party talks are the best way

to solve the North Korea problem, to which Japan and South Korea have agreed as well. All are talking about a multilateral security mechanism in East Asia, however, neither the United States, Japan or South Korea has a feasible blueprint. Therefore, such a regional security mechanism has lost substantial attraction to China.

The current state is that the six-party talks cannot reach any agreement and cannot solve the problem effectively. Yet, they will not disappear in practice because any progress on the North Korean issue must be the result of agreement by the six parties. Unfortunately, the result will be temporary paralysis.

Internal Dynamics

The question of how China's policies toward North Korea are determined is not straightforward. First of all, the current policies adopted by Beijing are not dominated by military authorities. North Korea is now considered far less of a vital strategic "buffer zone," than it was in the past. Any ultimate decision regarding Beijing's policy toward North Korea is directly subject to judgment and selection at the highest level, yet, the influence over that policy has always oscillated between the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which focuses on coordination with the international community, and the International Department of the Chinese Communist Party's Central Committee (CCPCC), which stresses the relationship between China and North Korea. While the former camp can hardly be called a 'pro-West' group it does advocate coordination with the West. The latter camp, on the other hand, can be called 'pro-Pyongyang' and advocates strongly for cooperation with North Korea.

The CCPCC's International Department oversees exchange with other political parties and is generally sympathetic to North Korea, often calling for a strengthened relationship between the Chinese and the North Korean political parties and governments and advocating full "political trust" in Pyongyang. This pro-Pyongyang element also believes that North Korea will in the end accept China's advice to reform and open up and that China has great influence over North Korea.

Beginning with North Korea's decision to launch the missile tests, and now the nuclear tests, the International Department has had declining influence on Beijing's formulation of policy toward North Korea. This is evidenced by the meeting held by the Central Committee on Foreign Affairs in late August of 2006, which said that China would adhere to its new concept for

diplomacy, including “taking the road of peaceful development”, “opening up and mutual benefit”, “building of a harmonious world”, and a “focus on the individual.”⁵ Most importantly, the conference proceedings proclaim that a nuclear North Korea is a formidable challenge to China’s “core interests.” In Beijing’s discourse, only Taiwan’s independence movement has been previously interpreted in that way. The gist of these principles is that China will strengthen coordination of its own diplomacy with that of the mainstream of the international community.

The policies currently being adopted by North Korea strongly conflict with China’s diplomatic goals and have greatly narrowed Beijing’s space for diplomatic maneuvering in the six-party talks. It has impaired Beijing’s ability to influence the United States, Japan and other hardliners to compromise with North Korea. These difficulties are plaguing China’s mediation efforts on the North Korean nuclear issue, generating unprecedented political pressure within the government. However, the reassessment of its North Korea policy does not automatically lead to more decisive and harsher actions against Pyongyang. It’s not so easy for the Hu Jintao-Wen Jiabao team (president and premier of China) to stand up to the threat imposed by nuclear North Korea. Beijing is still weighing all options and considering the most workable roadmap to proceed with its policy objective of denuclearization. Considering the delicacy and complexity of its options, Beijing will not make up its mind quickly. But what is certain right now is that a nuclear North Korea holds bleak and adverse implications for China and threatens to undermine almost all elements of Hu’s foreign policy strategy of a “harmonious world,” upon which he has invested a lot.⁶

North Korea is now considered far less of a vital strategic “buffer zone,” than it was in the past.

The decision by the Hu government in May 2003 to mediate the North Korean nuclear crisis was a defining moment for Chinese diplomacy. It signaled that China would become more proactive and self-confident in its diplomatic efforts and strive to make innovative use of China’s rising international influence toward playing a positive role in maintaining the country’s important peripheral diplomacy. This has been proven successful with the five rounds of six-party talks on the North Korean nuclear issue. This is why China’s participation in the six-party talks received extensive support in domestic

mainstream public opinion. However, some academic and policy circles in China have opposed the nation's role as mediator, suggesting that Beijing's hosting of the six-party talks is tantamount to "a small horse pulling a large cart", or China's diplomatic clout is not sufficient for the task.

In a similar vein, Hu's proactive and rational international policy approach is facing new challenges. Some in China have expressed sympathy for North Korea, believing that its actions are still a kind of support to China's strategic position and even a counter-balance to the United States and Japan.⁷ Such voices have grown louder following the North Korean missile launch and did not fade even after the nuclear test by the DPRK. Some arguments, characterized as "conspiracy theory" (the United States deliberately delayed the resolution on the nuclear issue with North Korea in order to invigorate Japan's rearming process) and "transference theory" (U.S. intentions to transfer more strategic pressure on China by broadening hostilities among East Asian regional members) have arisen to contradict the Bush administration's moderate response and non-military intimidation against North Korea.⁸ For the ossified forces within the conservative camp that were originally discontent with Hu and Wen and their new style government, the missile launches and nuclear test only provide them with new fodder for attacking the Hu-Wen team. In the run up to the 17th Party Congress, Chinese politics are now entering a sensitive period. North Korea's actions have, on balance, damaged the diplomatic prestige of the Chinese reformists represented by Hu and Wen. If China's policy toward North Korea is dragged into the domestic struggle over political power, the future orientation of China's diplomatic policies towards North Korea will become even more complicated.

Re-orienting China's North Korean Policy

The test launch of missiles by North Korea has shaken Beijing's confidence in its past policy toward North Korea. The nuclear test conducted by North Korea was the last straw to substantively spur Beijing to rethink its relationship with the North.

China has implemented a range of measures in response to North Korea's defiant attitude, its missile test firing as well as the negative consequences that may arise in North Korea's internal situation as a result of its actions. In terms of its overall approach, following the missile test (and before the nuclear test), China began to initiate coercive diplomatic measures toward Pyongyang. This

can be seen by a number of changes in China's actions toward North Korea.

In the first place, whereas trade between China and North Korea should theoretically be growing, it remained stagnant between January and July of 2006 and even decreased in key products such as iron, steel, chemical and plant products (see **Appendix**). China temporarily froze an existing agreement for a large-scale development project for border trade between the two countries. An important outcome of Kim's visit to China in January 2006 was to step-up economic and trade cooperation between the border cities and regions. A large-scale border trade summit was originally scheduled for September 2006, which would have been attended by high-ranking officials from both sides, but the meeting was cancelled.

Meanwhile, Beijing delayed large-scale aid measures for North Korea following the flood disaster in July and only initially provided some symbolic aid through the Red Cross. Although South Korea announced a large-scale aid worth 200 billion won, Beijing stated subsequently on Aug. 30 that "the Chinese government is very concerned about the disaster in North Korea, and has decided to give humanitarian assistance, including grain, food, diesel and medicine," although Beijing had yet to decide on specific amounts of the goods.⁹ China later decided to provide 50,000 tons of aid, the equivalent of half of South Korea's aid. It is a rare occurrence that China lags behind South Korea in providing disaster relief for North Korea and is a bellwether of Beijing's new tendency to use economic leverage to punish Pyongyang.

How China addresses nuclear North Korea has more to do with its resolve and less to do with its policy.

Besides economic and aid measures, China has sent more troops to the Sino-North Korean border region. Although the Chinese media reported that China was sending reinforcements to the border and carrying out missile drills in Changbai Mountains in mid-July as part of a "routine military exercise," the fact is that China wants to enhance its ability to react in case of a contingency involving North Korea.¹⁰ This does not represent the position of the military, rather, it indicates that China's senior leadership is very concerned about the possibility of an emergency in North Korea and has to intensify any preparation for it in the days to come.

In addition, China has tightened visa management for North Koreans entering China to prevent the DPRK from making further use of China as a conduit for illegal activities, such as the lynching of its own citizens that try to seek sanctuary in China, and smuggling.

China is also, for the first time, participating in multilateral sanctions. But furthermore, China is carrying out bilateral sanctions against North Korea. China will not obstruct strict economic sanctions and may temporarily suspend oil supplies to North Korea via the UN Security Council, though it would likely stop short of allowing military action against the DPRK.

Yet, despite the tremendous diplomatic and political pressure exerted on China by the DPRK's missile and nuclear tests, China's leaders will continue to explore the boundaries of influencing North Korea. Before the North Korean nuclear test, Beijing would not have pushed its close neighbor and "brother" into a corner because this would not only have contravened China's own interests, but would have also departed from the broadly accepted thinking of the Chinese people. However, if sanctions cannot move North Korea to abandon its nuclear weapons, the possibility that China will employ other means to roll back North Korea's nuclear weapons program is real. If this is the only alternative, China will use a variety of methods to accomplish that goal, including coercive diplomacy and perhaps ultimately regime transformation. The crucial issue here is that China will have to make up its mind.

How China addresses nuclear North Korea has more to do with its resolve and less to do with its policy. Prior to the nuclear test, Beijing saw no imperative to act decisively against North Korea. The situation has dramatically changed however. Beijing has no alternative but to employ any and all means to get North Korea to return to its commitments to abandon nuclear weapons (exemplified in the September 2005 Joint Statement) and map out with other parties a feasible plan to trade its nuclear capabilities for economic compensation and diplomatic normalization. Thus, as Amb. Wang Guangya said at the UN, "no one is going to protect North Korea if it continues with its bad behavior."¹¹ Beijing has lost its patience and will not allow this issue to stagnate in multi-lateral talks. Presently, Hu looks like he has more resolve than ever to safeguard China against any diversion from the country's economic construction. Firmly addressing a nuclear North Korea is a great test for Hu and for China. If done successfully, it will add significantly to his capability and power within China and bolster China's prestige internationally. 🌐

Appendix

China's Imports from North Korea from January to July 2005 and 2006 (\$ in U.S. millions)				
Product	[Jan.-July 2005]	[Jan.-July 2006]	Difference	% change
Total Value	281.626	236.687	-44.939	-15.96
Animal Products	66.616	18.055	-48.561	-72.90
Mineral Products	112.300	124.712	+12.412	+11.05
Chemical Products	0.368	0.235	-0.113	-30.71
Leather, Fur and Fur Products, Rubber	0.077	0.009	-0.068	-88.31
Wood and Wooden Products	7.124	14.112	+6.988	+98.09
Jewelry and Precious Metal	0.015	0.033	+0.018	+120.00
Basic Metal	50.413	25.942	-24.471	-48.54
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China's Exports to North Korea from January to July 2005 and 2006 (\$ in U.S. millions)				
Product	[Jan.-July 2005]	[Jan.-July 2006]	Difference	% change
Summary	618.100	678.498	+60.398	+9.77
Food, Beverages, and Tobacco	23.714	20.339	-3.375	-14.23
Mineral Fuel, Mineral Oil, Asphalt.	168.965	211.699	+42.73	+25.29
Fertilizer	16.482	21.618	+5.136	+31.16
Ceramics, Glass and Other Mineral Products	12.793	8.695	-4.098	-32.03
Jewelry and Precious Metal	0.067	0.043	-0.024	-35.82
Basic Metal	46.212	34.501	-11.711	-25.34
Machinery & Electronics	60.517	106.365	+45.848	+75.76
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Source of data: January - July 2006 statistics from *China Customs*

Notes

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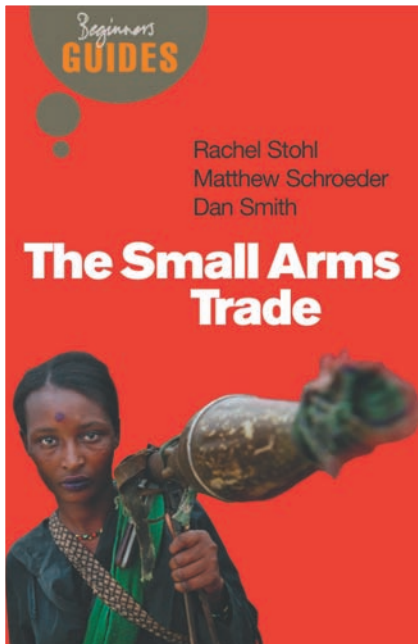
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WEAPONS OF INDIVIDUAL DESTRUCTION



The Small Arms Trade

A Beginner's Guide

RACHEL STOHL, MATTHEW SCHROEDER &
DAN SMITH

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Situation Report

Xinjiang Oil Industry Development

Xinjiang will be one of China's primary strategic regions for oil and gas development in the 21st Century. The region's oil exploration and production has traditionally been highly resistant to the inclusion of non-state interests, however, this investment landscape is changing. With booming national demand and government support, the region's petroleum industry shows great promise for investment by both domestic and foreign private capital. Capturing the burgeoning opportunities in this region remains a challenge but is nevertheless luring the industry's major players around the globe. This situation report attempts to sketch a general framework and analysis of the emerging and rapidly expanding opportunities of Xinjiang's oil industry.

A Land of Great Potential

Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region is a land of unparalleled beauty as well as China's most abundant resource of oil and gas. The area holds over 20 percent of the country's potential petroleum reserves with an estimated 20-40 billion tons of oil and 12.4 trillion m³ natural gas. As exploration deepens, large oil-fields with up to 100 million tons of reserves are being discovered in Xinjiang nearly every year.

As the government shifts the focus of its oil development to western regions, Xinjiang is rapidly becoming China's largest strategic region for the petroleum industry. Between 1990 and 2001, over RMB120 billion (\$15bn) was invested in related infrastructure and development. In 2005 alone, crude oil output in the Xinjiang region totaled 24 million tons, up 7.5 percent over 2004. Xinjiang is also now an important oil and petrochemical production base in western China.

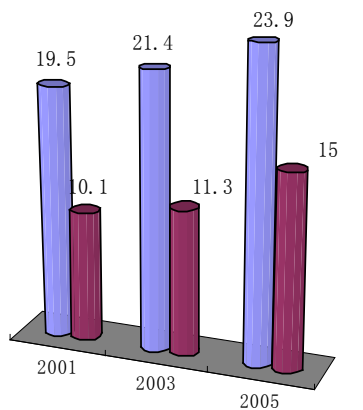
The Region has also become crucial to processing petroleum products, which increased by 17 percent from 2004 to 2005. Xinjiang has a capacity to process and refine 20 million tons of crude oil and churn out



Xinjiang Region

some 200 petrochemical products, fertilizers and plastics.

A number of national transport projects have already been completed including the China-Kazakhstan Crude Oil Pipeline First-Phase Project and the Western China Pipeline that provides critical infrastructure upon which China can exploit its natural resources and bring the oil to its markets in eastern China.



■ Crude Oil Output (million ton)
■ Processed Volume (million ton)

Crude Oil Output and Processing in Xinjiang for 10th Five-Year Plan Period (2001-2005)

A Changing Investment Landscape

In the past, the oil and gas industry has largely been controlled by state interests, limiting outside investment. The China National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC), China's largest oil enterprise, has monopolized oil and gas extraction in the Xinjiang region. The three major oil and gas fields of Tarim, Karamay and Tuha all belong to CNPC. The SINOPEC Northwest Branch Company, which entered the regional market in 1978, is the second largest player in Xinjiang.

Besides these two giants, several other state-owned oil refinery and chemical companies are firmly established in Xinjiang including the Dushanzi Oil and Petrochemical Company, the Karamay Petrochemical Company, Urumqi Petrochemical Company, Zepu Petrochemical Plant, Northwest Administration Bureau Tarim Petrochemical Plant and the Tarim Petrochemical Plant.

However, private enterprises have also become increasingly important in the petrochemical and downstream production development industries in Xinjiang. In accordance with the central government's strategy, "Develop the West," the government of the

Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region has formulated a number of preferential taxation policies to encourage private investment and cultivate newly established enterprises (see full report).

The Markor Investment Group and Guanghui Group are the two large private concerns that have made a significant mark in the natural gas processing business. With an investment that will eventually reach 9 billion rmb into LNG plants in Shanshan, in the Junggar and Tarim basins, Guanghui will become the largest LPG production base in China by 2008.

To ensure oil and gas output and stable export growth, the Xinjiang government has set the ambitious goal of double-digit annual growth for exploration, development, and processing. By 2010, it plans to reach an oil and gas output of 60 million tons, approximately three times the amount in 2005. In addition, it has the goal of increasing the added value in the petrochemical industry by 70 percent over other industries in Xinjiang. In short, the government's ambition is to build Xinjiang into China's largest oil and natural gas production base and major land passageway for national energy security.

Growing Opportunities

Based on on-site surveys and interviews, this situation report lays out several areas of promising private investment trends in the sectors of oil and gas development and the petrochemical industry in Xinjiang.

Upstream Market

Under the dual pressures of honoring China's commitments to the World Trade Organization as well as encouraging domestic private enterprises to enter the upstream field, the National Development and Reform Commission has begun liberating China's upstream field further to private interests. In

Xinjiang, where the three major State-owned oil companies have in the past controlled this sector, in 2006 CNPC has opened 12 blocks in the Tarim Oilfield to foreign enterprise bidding.

To facilitate this goal, the State Council has introduced policies and new regulations to encourage domestic and foreign capital to take part in resource exploration, with special mention of opening up to non-state owned enterprises in the upstream oil market.

There is a caveat to these positive developments. The administrative measures for mineral resources exploration still contain many restrictions on private capital in the upstream sector, leaving in place many obstacles to market access. In an oilfield near Kuqa, a city in southern Xinjiang, several small oil fields had been previously developed by private companies but by the end of 2005, all were bought back by CNPC and its subsidiaries. Consequently, twists and turns are expected yet as private and foreign capital make forays into the upstream sector in Xinjiang.

Nevertheless, the prospects for greater opening of the upstream sector are good. With early cooperation with State-owned oil companies, there are indeed examples of private oil concerns elsewhere in Xinjiang that have successfully entered the upstream oil and gas field through subcontracting small blocks from CNPC or SINOPEC.



Oilfield Services & Petrochemicals

With the rapid growth of oil and gas development, petroleum processing and petrochemical industries have lagged behind. Therefore, compared with the caution of the government and the State-owned oil companies in liberating the upstream oil field, the major oil cities in southern Xinjiang have been far more open to private investment in oil refinery and in-depth processing and oil field services. The increase in the output of oil and in particular, natural gas in the Tarim Basin and Aksu Prefecture in southern Xinjiang have on the one hand instilled confidence in the local governments to develop their petrochemical industry and on the other amplified the market demand for services in the oil field sector.

Nineteen industry parks with a focus on petrochemical industry have already been set up in Xinjiang, plus another 45 waiting to be approved. Luntai County, also in the south of Xinjiang, has founded the Hongqiao Chemical Industry Park which is encouraging direct private investment in oil field services or petrochemical enterprises. The government department has introduced a series of incentive policies, such as tax exemptions and reductions, low land rent and land transfer fees. In addition, government officials are facilitating investment through institutional and administrative support.

Near Kuqa, new oil reserves have been found. CNPC, the Government of Xinjiang, Xinjiang production Corps and SINOPEC plan to invest RMB20 billion in the region to build Kuqa into a large-scale petrochemical base that integrates upstream and downstream sectors.

As the petrochemical industry requires significant water resources, Xinjiang's low rainfall and a dry climate is a potential drawback. Yet, the region has rich groundwater reserves and



the impact on local water resources and the environment can be limited through rational chemical industry structure and planning.

Associated Gas Recovery

Gas can be recovered in the process of oil extraction. In southern Xinjiang, due to limited technology and investment, the associated gas recovery rate is very low. Apart from a small part which is used by oilfields for power or heat generation, most associated gas in China is burnt directly. While China's demand for natural gas has been soaring in recent years and the price of natural gas has increased substantially, this associated gas recovery business reveals an emerging opportunity for investors.

The Tarim River oil field and the Yaha oil field, where major oil reserves were found in 2005, there are at least 20 associated gas burning ports and each gas port burns some 200,000m³ of natural gas each day. That means 3 to 4 million m³ of natural gas is wasted, enough to supply the domestic consumption of a medium-sized city.

Therefore, it would be a win-win strategy for the government's oil interests if investors can cooperate with oil companies to compress such associated gas and transport it through pipelines or process it into LNG. As for processing associated gas into LNG, the

Guanghui Group is currently also a pioneer among private enterprises.

Representing an investment trend greatly encouraged by local governments in Xinjiang, this transformation of 'waste-to-product' investment is also expected to get support from State-owned oil companies. However, both pipeline construction and LNG liquefaction require major investment. Also, more investment stability needs to be implemented by signing long-term gas supply contracts with the suppliers. This requires major investors with greater commitment and foresight.

Environmental Protection

Environmental degradation is forcing the government and the public to pay far more attention to issues of environmental security. According to this survey, employees of oil majors have a greatly increased awareness of environmental protection in recent years. Oil companies are also doing much more environmental protection work. One of the more important areas relevant to the petroleum and petrochemical industry includes increasingly stringent standards for waste treatment.

As a result of the rapid growth of petroleum and petrochemical industries, environmental issues are becoming a burgeoning industry and will also be open to private investment. According to officials of CNPC Tarim Oilfield Company, environmental work now accounts for some 4 percent of its total cost burden.

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War Society Responsibility

2006 U.S.-China Media Conference: Crisis Reporting

In November 2006, Washington Observer Weekly and China Security Quarterly co-sponsored the U.S.-China Media Conference on *Crisis Reporting*. This unprecedented annual forum was held in Beijing and Shanghai, bringing together 100 Chinese and American journalists examining reporting on war and conflict, social challenges and journalistic responsibility in crises.

Speakers

James FALLOWS

National correspondent of the *Atlantic Monthly*

Michael GORDON

Chief military correspondent, *New York Times*

Jon SAWYER

Director, *Pulitzer Center on Crisis Reporting*

Tong CHEN

Editor in chief and senior vice president of *Sina.com*

Lin HONG

Chief reporter, *China Radio International*

Qing HUANG

Former director of the International News Department, *People's Daily*

Chang LIU

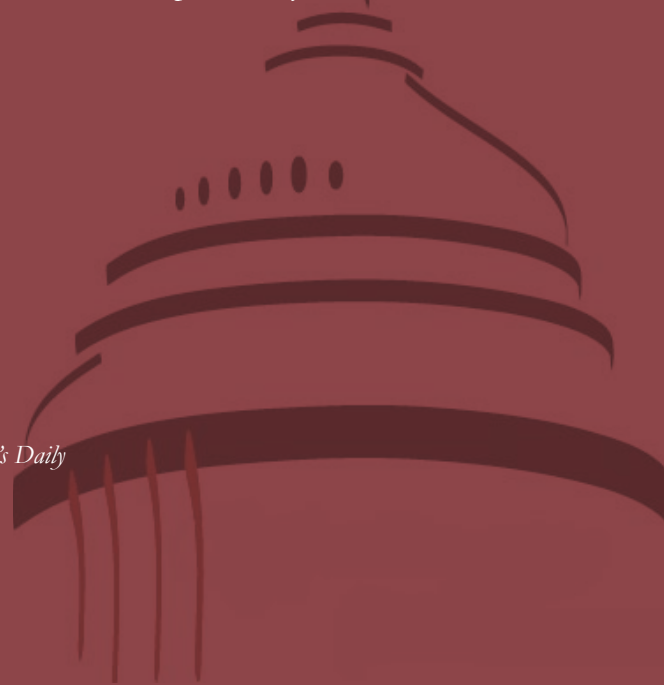
Chief reporter, *China Youth Daily*

Weixiang PENG

Editor in chief, *China Newsweek*

Jing WEI

Former Washington correspondent of *Phoenix Satellite TV*



The Fallacy of Nuclear Primacy

Bruce G. Blair and Chen Yali

In their disturbing analysis of the growing strength of U.S. nuclear forces, professors Keir A. Lieber and Daryl G. Press predict a deterioration of the global security environment in spite of this seemingly positive trend.¹ By their calculations, the American nuclear juggernaut now confers absolute nuclear superiority over Russia and China as well as lesser nuclear powers. The imbalance, they contend, has become so lop-sided that the United States today could mount a surprise nuclear attack that would completely destroy Russian or Chinese nuclear retaliatory forces – a first-strike capacity that dramatically overturns a long history of nuclear stalemate. But in an ironic twist of fate, the weakness of America’s adversaries only undermines U.S. and global security. The reason is that American nuclear supremacy removes the root source of

*Bruce G. Blair is the President of the World Security Institute. Mr. Blair is the author of numerous articles and books on security issues including the *Logic of Accidental Nuclear War* and *Global Zero Alert for Nuclear Forces*. He is presently completing a new book on U.S. nuclear policy.*

*Chen Yali is the editor in chief of *Washington Observer*. She is also a Program Manager of *Chen Shi China Research Group* based in Beijing.*

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stability from the nuclear equation: mutual vulnerability. The cornerstone of stable deterrence and political caution during the Cold War – mutual assured destruction (MAD), has crumbled. The professors anticipate a consequent fraying of great power relations, and an increase in the likelihood of nuclear war.

Their thesis suggests that nuclear primacy will embolden the U.S. to press its nuclear advantage in unthinkable ways.

Primacy is a double-edged sword that may confer advantage and court disaster at the same time. In some circumstances the United States may use it to advantage, gaining coercive leverage over its adversaries in a confrontation (how much, if any, leverage is conferred by nuclear supremacy is a key open question in the professors' minds). In

others, the coercive impulse may backfire; the risks may outweigh the benefits if American pressure triggers reactive nuclear alerting and escalation in a crisis – increasing the danger of accidental, unauthorized, or hastily ordered nuclear attacks. Overwhelming U.S. nuclear superiority, whether intentionally exploited or not, will also exert pressure on America's nuclear rivals to invest heavily in modernizing their forces in order to reduce their vulnerability and restore a semblance of nuclear balance. U.S. superiority and its efforts to preserve it in the face of countervailing Russian and Chinese nuclear modernization thus threaten to ignite a nuclear arms race, one that could last for a very long time in light of the wide and widening American lead. Given the decrepit state of the Russian strategic forces and the small size and acute vulnerability of the Chinese strategic arsenal, and the plethora of ongoing U.S. improvements to its arsenal, the professors estimate that a decisive U.S. advantage could endure for a decade or more. The strategic capabilities 'gap' is too wide to be closed anytime soon.

The professors' thesis approaches the height of controversy when it suggests that the United States has deliberately sought the capability to disarm its nuclear rivals and has long designed its strategic arsenal for a nuclear first-strike against Russia and China. Citing the steady improvement in U.S. strategic weapons over decades of modernization – particularly the striking gains in missile accuracy and stealth bomber technology, combined with intensive efforts to track Soviet strategic submarines, the professors conclude that the United States has long been deliberately pursuing a first-strike strategy.

Their thesis reaches the zenith of its provocation when it suggests that nuclear primacy will embolden the United States to press its nuclear advantage in possibly unthinkable ways. U.S. leaders might try to exploit its nuclear superiority not only by trying to extract concessions during a crisis, but also by actually launching a cold-blooded nuclear attack against its nuclear rival in the midst of an intense crisis. The professors discount significantly the power of the nuclear taboo to restrain U.S. leaders from crossing the fateful threshold. If crisis circumstances grow dire enough, the temptation to try to disarm their nuclear adversaries through a nuclear first-strike may be too strong to resist, they argue.

In projecting a turbulent decade ahead in relations among the major nuclear rivals, the professors anticipate specifically that nuclear dynamics will grow more dangerous as weak adversaries take desperate steps to reverse their growing vulnerability and as the strong power weighs newfound opportunities to exploit its advantage. The weak may be driven to preemption for survival, and the strong tempted to initiate a preventive nuclear strike. The professors predict escalatory updrafts in both peacetime and crisis interactions that are at best partially moderated by the nuclear taboo, the end of the Cold War, and risk aversion. All sides may be willing to take cosmic risks. The United States, now endowed with ostensible first-strike capacity, will not be automatically dissuaded from nuclear aggression by recognizing that there would be no guarantee of complete success in disarming the opposing side. The professors find no supporting historical evidence, and ample disconfirming evidence, for the oft-claimed dampening effect of so-called existential deterrence – the notion that the mere possibility, or even just the conceivability, of retaliation by an inferior opponent would serve to deter the superior side. The irreducible risk that a first strike might fail in unexpected ways and result in retaliation that inflicts severe damage to the United States is not, in the professors' view, sufficient cause by itself to inhibit U.S. leaders from rolling the dice.

Pentagon's Rebuttal

The professors' arguments elicited an avalanche of criticism from wide-ranging quarters including the Pentagon.² The assistant defense secretary for international security policy took particular aim at the contention that the United States is pursuing a first-strike strategy.³ Calling this contention "an erroneous inference," the official cited recent trends toward major strategic

forces reductions as inconsistent with such a strategy. He asserted, moreover, that presidential statements and authoritative posture reviews endorse the traditional policy of second-strike deterrence. Noting a longstanding policy of not relying on the ability to conduct a nuclear first strike to ensure the survival of the United States, this official claims that the U.S. force posture is designed only to ensure that U.S. forces could retaliate to an enemy attack with such devastating force that any aggressor could not stand to gain. In short, the Pentagon invoked the classic formulation of deterrence based on massive retaliation as the bedrock of past and present American nuclear policy.

In a similar vein, another fierce critic of the professors' first-strike thesis labeled it "a gross mischaracterization of U.S. policy."⁴ This critic – a defense intellectual and former senior defense official in the Bush administration, and a defense contractor, tried to debunk the first-strike claim largely by citing formerly secret documents and authoritative public statements that indicate the United States has long relinquished any aspiration of first-strike supremacy. Far from harboring such ambition today, the architects of U.S. nuclear policy abandoned the notion of winning a nuclear war and adopted the principle of mutual deterrence by the early- to mid-1960s, and proceeded to design a retaliatory strategic posture accordingly. The reduced size and much of the reconfiguration of the U.S. strategic arsenal over the past decade – particularly the retirement of the silo-busting Peacekeeper missiles – as well as the virtual absence of active and passive defenses for protecting the United States from enemy nuclear attacks, point to a conscious U.S. rejection of a first-strike war-winning strategy.

Professors' Rejoinder

The professors' rejoinder to these critics emphasizes the increasing lethality of U.S. strategic forces despite their reduced numbers.⁵ Upgrades to the U.S. arsenal have resulted in a stunning increase in its counterforce deadliness beyond anything necessary to maintain simple deterrence, suggesting to the professors a strong U.S. desire for nuclear primacy and an intentional effort to achieve it throughout the Cold War period and to this day. Only nuclear primacy would justify the extensive upgrades to the U.S. capability for attacking and destroying Russia's arsenal, they believe. Furthermore, recently declassified documents provide what constitutes, in the professors' judgment, overwhelming evidence of preemptive war planning as late as 1969, including

a number of explicitly preemptive options that war planners even contemplated might be exercised in a bolt-from-the-blue surprise attack against the Soviet Union. They believe that further declassification of documents will reveal a continuation of this preemptive thinking by Pentagon strategists in the 1970s and 1980s, and even later as it appears to them that the United States has never abandoned plans for preemptive nuclear war.

First-Strike Intentions

Both the professors and their critics failed to adduce some key points that would have illuminated the question of America's first-strike intentions and plans. One key to resolving their disagreement over true intentions concerns the high level of destruction that U.S. strategic forces were required to inflict on Soviet targets in wartime. Throughout the Cold War and later, the Pentagon architects of U.S. nuclear strategy instructed U.S. strategic commanders to ensure that U.S. forces could destroy no less than 70 to 90 percent of the Soviet targets in each of four categories – nuclear forces, conventional forces, war-supporting industry, and leadership.⁶ The normal peacetime and crisis alert postures of the U.S. arsenal were thus configured to permit the rapid destruction of a quite large portion of the Soviet arsenal. U.S. nuclear planning strove to meet an average of 80 percent so-called 'damage expectancy', sometimes resulting in the assigning of dozens of U.S. nuclear weapons to strike the same target to ensure its destruction. For example, as recently as 1991 the U.S. strategic war plan aimed 69 nuclear warheads at the Pushkino battle management radar north of Moscow, which controlled the anti-ballistic missile interceptors protecting the city as well as the radar itself, in order to meet the high 'damage expectancy' requirement against this single target that U.S. planners credited with high blast resistance and active, effective self-defense using its own interceptors.⁷

Holding at risk such a high fraction of the Soviet target base is quite aggressive and from a certain angle could appear to approach the 100 percent destruction that a committed first-strike policy would seek. And if Soviet (or Russian) forces that normally enjoyed a high degree of invulnerability because of their dispersion and mobility fell into disrepair and became confined to their home bases and ports where they became vulnerable to sudden attack, then the United States could approach 100 percent 'damage expectancy' effortlessly. A lack of Russian diligence in operational terms could by default

boost U.S. attack capabilities into the first-strike league. But this was not the original intent of the U.S. planners. Regarding a first-strike capability as beyond realistic aspiration, they generally set their sights lower than 100 percent. And generally the level of damage expectancy that U.S. forces could realistically achieve was well below 100 percent, leaving Russia with at least a small survivable force capable of inflicting unacceptable damage to the United States. Whether or not the current Russian force poses such a minimal deterrent threat to the United States, or is acutely vulnerable to a disarming

The historical record strongly indicates that the U.S. has not consciously pursued a first-strike strategy.

U.S. first strike today, the historical record strongly indicates that the United States has not consciously pursued a first-strike strategy as an act of deliberate national policy.

Future history is of course still being written, and we may yet witness the United States embarking on a new path with absolute nuclear superiority over Russia (and

China) as its goal. But few signs indicate an American quest for nuclear primacy vis-à-vis Russia or China. By contrast, there are ample indications that the United States seeks nuclear superiority over many other states and actors, including Iran, North Korea, and other potential proliferant states and non-state actors including terrorist organizations. Establishing and maintaining a nuclear first strike capability against these states and groups may reasonably be construed to be an aim of current U.S. national security policy.

Preemption versus First-Strike

Both the professors and their critics also muddy the waters by often conflating preemption and first strike. Thus the debate at times revolves around whether or when the United States added or removed preemptive options to or from its nuclear war plan, as though their presence would prove the existence of a first-strike strategy. The professors are right about the fact that the U.S. war plan featured these options well past the 1960s. Designated preemptive options existed long after that (through at least the late 1980s), and at any rate the immediate launch readiness of modern strategic missiles created an inherent capability to strike quickly and first. But while delivering the first blow is essential to any strategy that seeks to completely decimate

an adversary's nuclear arsenal, it may also be essential to go first in order to destroy only a fraction of that arsenal. As it turns out, U.S. strategic forces for practically the entire Cold War period could not meet their damage expectancy requirements if they absorbed a Soviet attack before retaliation. The U.S. nuclear war machine could not afford to ride out an attack if it sought to achieve its war aim of destroying a major fraction – but by no means all – of the Soviet nuclear arsenal. To wipe out 70-90 percent of the Soviet target base, additional U.S. forces needed to be put on combat alert, and virtually all of the alert forces had to be unleashed before Soviet forces could hit them.⁸

Under these pressures, the United States either must have initiated the war with a preemptive attack, or launched its strategic forces quickly on tactical warning of a Soviet missile salvo ('launch-on-warning') before incoming Soviet warheads could strike U.S. missile silos and bomber bases. If it waited too long and suffered losses on the ground, the U.S. retaliatory forces could not perform their assigned mission. If U.S. leaders waited too long to order the launch of U.S. forces, and the Soviets concentrated their nuclear firepower on the U.S. command system, then the United States might not have been able to retaliate at all. Preemption, or launch-on-warning, provided the only reliable wartime options for partially disarming the Soviet Union.

Launch on Warning Negates First-Strike Strategy

As both sides acquired in the 1970s and 1980s credible options to launch on warning (firing forces almost immediately upon receiving reports of enemy missile launches from ground- and space-based warning sensors), the utility of a first strike declined greatly. Initiating a sudden strike using intercontinental rockets capable of destroying hard targets such as missile silos could not catch opposing forces on the ground. The opposing side could detect an incoming salvo of enemy warheads and launch its hair-trigger retaliatory forces during the 25-30 minute flight time of the incoming warheads. Submarine rockets positioned off the coasts of enemy territory could reach their targets much faster but they lacked the accuracy and yield needed to destroy hardened targets. (Their flight time from forward locations is 15 minutes or somewhat less, which is nearly the same as the launch-on-warning timeline.)

These hair-trigger postures on both sides greatly diminished if not negated the utility of first-strike options in the U.S. and Soviet war plans. The options

underwent a sharp devaluation, just as retaliation after ride-out had much earlier been deemed an unreliable option due to vulnerabilities of missile silos and command systems. Both sides' plans gravitated to the middle ground between going first and retaliating after ride-out. Launch on warning became the predominant and preferred option in their strategic war plans.

LOW Dangers and Impracticalities

This shift created enormous pressure on the decision process. Allowing only minutes to detect and assess an apparent attack, only minutes to consider how to respond, and only minutes to carry out a retaliatory option, launch on warning all but eliminated the opportunity for deliberate rational decision-making and leadership.⁹ It reduced cosmic choices to rote decision-making by checklists in what amounted to enacting a prepared script. And it introduced frightful risks that human error and technical malfunction would cause an accidental nuclear war.

Launch on warning quickly lost its viability in the Russian nuclear posture, however.¹⁰ The United States began in 1992 deploying accurate high-yield submarine missiles capable of destroying hardened targets, and thereby severely degraded Russia's ability to launch its strategic missiles before they were destroyed on the ground. Russian forces within range of Trident D-5 missiles in the Atlantic and Pacific could no longer beat the clock to launch in time for them to survive. All targets in Russia could be struck by deadly submarine rockets with pinpoint accuracy in less time than it took for Russia to launch on warning, even if the Russian early warning network performed well and provided reliable timely reports of incoming Trident warheads.

In addition, as the professors correctly note, the Russian early warning system of satellite infra-red and ground radar sensors has deteriorated sharply over the past decade.¹¹ As a result, there are some gaping holes in Russian coverage of Trident submarine missile corridors, particularly in the Pacific region. This decline further eroded any Russian margin for reliable launch on warning, but as noted above that margin previously evaporated with the advent of Trident silo-busting missiles with flight times that are shorter than Russian nuclear decision cycles. This double-whammy – unreliable Russian warning and Trident missiles outracing Russian speed of response – all but ruled out launch on warning by Russia as a practical matter, even though it remains the cornerstone of Russian strategy to this day.

The professors' assumption in their model that Russia would be forced to absorb the brunt of a U.S. preemptive or preventive strike before it could retaliate is thus a reasonable one. It withstands the scrutiny and criticism of a leading Russian scholar based at Stanford who challenges the professors' characterization of Russian early warning on the grounds that "...Russia would gain very little were its early warning system to be deployed to the fullest extent. Adding the capability to detect SLBM launches would not dramatically increase the time available to the Russian leadership for assessing attacks."¹² We would agree with these statements in that a full-scale U.S. first strike would doubtless entail so many launches by so many different delivery vehicles from so many directions that in all likelihood the Russian early warning system would sound the alarm early and loudly despite its hobbled condition. And Russia would gain little in any case inasmuch as its forces still could not launch in time to escape destruction on the ground. The Russian critic is right, but it does not invalidate the professors' assumption of Russia's inability to launch on warning.

Existential LOW

It would be foolhardy for U.S. leaders to adopt the professors' assumption, however. On the contrary, conservative planners would assume that Russia could exercise launch on warning during an opening salvo before its early warning system sustained massive damage from nuclear strikes on Russian territory. Russia has built and extensively exercised a hair-trigger command and early warning system that is thoroughly geared to launch on warning. It is an ingenious apparatus that allows for the direct launching of far-flung nuclear missiles by the Moscow-based General Staff and various alternate command centers through a streamlined redundant communications network.¹³ And although the competing timelines pitting U.S. missiles and Russian quick-launch in a race against time slightly favor the United States, the margin is too slim for comfort. The time difference is measured in seconds to at most a few minutes. No conservative planner on either side could confidently predict which side would cross the finish line first. In this vein, it should be emphasized that the difference in launch timing among preemption, launch on warning, and retaliation after ride-out is also measured in minutes, not hours. All of about 30 minutes bracket the temporal differences among these three timing options.

Residual Instabilities

The professors' assessment of the potential instability of these nuclear dynamics is mostly convincing. Certainly for the canonical case of U.S.-Russian nuclear tension and confrontation, their projection conforms to classical theory of arms race and crisis instability. (The China case does not conform for reasons discussed later.) If their model's results showing the United States destroying all of Russia's and China's long-range nuclear forces in a first strike are valid, then in theory the acute vulnerability of these forces would indeed trigger destabilizing steps to reduce it by means of readying and dispersing sea- and land-based mobile forces. Theoretically, intense pressures and incentives would exist for Russia and China to ratchet up the alert readiness of their forces, and even to consider seriously a preemptive attack during a severely threatening crisis. Russia's preemptive impulse presumably has strengthened since U.S. Trident boats stripped Russia of its option for launch on warning.

Similarly, a crisis in theory could trigger a U.S. preventive attack if it truly believed that Russia had lost its ability to launch on warning, and that no Russian strategic forces would survive a U.S. first strike. U.S. leaders' preemptive impulse would theoretically grow stronger if Russia appeared on the verge of dispersing its mobile forces to ensure their survival, a process that would ruin America's chance to disarm Russia. (A massive barrage attack by U.S. nuclear warheads against the operating area of dispersed mobile forces would

not be practical or effective.) In addition to this dangerous dynamic, safeguards against accidental and unauthorized launches would weaken as the two sides prepared for nuclear war. Even greater instability and risks would theoretically exist in U.S.-China crisis interactions.

Although the professors are properly concerned with the turbulence associated with nuclear crises under the postulated conditions of acute Russian and Chinese vulnerability, they characterize all of the

steps taken during a crisis as *destabilizing*. This characterization is wrong. For instance, if Russia dispersed its mobile forces to protect them, and managed to do so without triggering U.S. preemption, the crisis would be somewhat

Timelines pitting U.S. missiles and Russian quick-launch in a race against time slightly favor the former, but the margin is too slim for comfort.

stabilized because Russia would have generated a survivable minimal nuclear deterrent. Admittedly, this transition would be dangerous, but it could lead to a more stable balance than the initial one. The professors mistakenly, or better myopically, view all crisis interactions as destabilizing, even those that restore mutual vulnerability.

Exploiting Primacy

The underlying crisis scenarios for their model are too vaguely outlined to grasp these transitions and their bad and good effects on stability. While the professors raise many questions about the implications of nuclear primacy for coercive diplomacy and escalation dominance during a crisis, the calculations invoked as evidence of nuclear primacy are based on a sudden first strike by the United States before Russia would disperse any strategic forces in order to protect them.

It simply strains credulity to imagine the United States strong-arming Russia during a crisis by dint of its first-strike threat when Russia could easily remove this threat by mobilizing some of its nuclear forces according to pre-programmed alert procedures. Russia historically has planned to do exactly that during a crisis. During the Cold War, it kept only 15-25 percent of its submarine forces at sea under normal peacetime conditions, for instance, with a view to surging the remainder of its submarine fleet to sea during a crisis.¹⁴ Today even fewer Russian submarines are on patrol under normal circumstances, and only small numbers of Russian mobile intercontinental rockets leave garrison on patrol in peacetime. But the low operating tempo, while partially caused by training and equipment readiness problems, mainly reflects the Russian planning premise that an American bolt-out-of-the-blue surprise nuclear attack in peacetime is completely implausible, and that serious U.S. threats made during a real crisis could be answered by surging subs and dispersing land rockets, and by projecting a plausible readiness to preempt or launch on warning if necessary.

The professors argue that these protective steps may be ineffectual in the *future* as a consequence of U.S. breakthroughs in surveillance, reconnaissance, and tracking that could expose the location of hidden strategic forces and render them vulnerable to destruction by U.S. forces. In fact, the professors assume such U.S. capabilities already exist. But this assumption is a very weak reed for their model to lean on. The Russians certainly have cause for con-

cern about the technological prowess of the United States, but U.S. progress in making the forests transparent to expose hidden Russian rockets is not that impressive, if the public record is any indication. And the defense still has the advantage over the offense. Simple protective countermeasures can be devised to offset new U.S. capabilities. At any rate, this is a large topic that is beyond the scope of any analysis that the professors have presented so far. It is also beyond the scope of this review.

A Shaky Model of Nuclear War

Concerning the *current* state of Russian vulnerability, the professors' analysis contains some flaws that cast their central thesis into serious doubt. The data used in their model are simply not reliable enough to support their sweeping generalization about America's ability to destroy all of Russia's strategic forces in a nuclear first strike.

Their assessment of the strategic imbalance rests on fairly solid empirical data on the characteristics of the Russian and U.S. nuclear arsenals, particularly their numbers, explosive yields, and ranges. But high confidence in their estimates of U.S. missile accuracy is unwarranted. Such estimates of missile inaccuracy (circular error probable) found in the public domain vary widely (by 30 percent or more), and their estimates lie on the optimistic end of the spectrum. (The real data are classified and so it is next to impossible to validate any model's estimates.) Actual accuracy achieved in wartime may also diverge from accuracy demonstrated in peacetime missile tests. The professors assume that accuracy could decline by as much as 20 percent in wartime, but what if their un-degraded peacetime estimate was too optimistic and the 20 percent wartime degradation came on top of it, resulting in a cumulative deviation of, say 40-50 percent from their baseline accuracy figure? The professors' sensitivity analysis of the effects of degraded accuracy on target destruction is thus too circumscribed, and they do not adequately inform the reader that the probabilities of destroying Russian hard targets such as missile silos would plummet if U.S. missiles missed their targets by a considerably greater distance than assumed by their model.

Other flawed assumptions further skew their model's results much too far in the direction of the total annihilation of Russian forces. The questionable assumptions primarily concern the alert status of both U.S. and Russian forces. First, the model assumes that the United States could covertly gener-

ate its off-alert strategic bomber force to combat-ready alert, and secretly undertake other large-scale preparations for a sneak attack. In the real world in peacetime, all bombers and their crews are kept at a low level of readiness. They are unarmed; all nuclear armaments (gravity bombs and cruise missiles) are kept in storage at their bombers' home bases. In this world, the alerting and arming of this force would take a minimum of 12 hours for the first bombers to reach combat ready status, with the rest of the bombers coming on line over the next 48 hours (72 hours total to generate the bulk of the force).¹⁵ It is a large-scale, 'noisy', and readily detectable process.

In the model, however, the majority of the bombers are uploaded with nuclear arms and readied for combat missions so surreptitiously as to remain undetected by any adversary. All of the supporting operations for the bomber force, ranging from readying and pre-deploying refueling tankers (most refueling occurs over Canada or the oceans mid-way to the targets) to assembling aircrews to activating command-control-communications links, also proceed so stealthily as to preserve the element of surprise. Submarine alerting and positioning for a surprise attack also go undetected. In short, very extensive nuclear attack preparations across the board of the U.S. strategic system fail to alert the adversary of the possibility of an impending attack.

This complete intelligence failure is not plausible. It is especially far-fetched in any context of U.S.-Russian crisis that would presumably motivate the U.S. nuclear alerting in the first place, but would also intensify intelligence gathering by the Russians. No sober U.S. political leader or military commander would count on achieving such complete surprise in the run-up to launching a full-scale strategic attack on a supposedly unsuspecting Russia in the midst of a crisis. No analyst of the strategic balance should treat such a prospect as anything but an excursion into the realm of remote possibility.

Second, the model overstates the peacetime vulnerability of Russian mobile missiles. It assumes that all 291 SS-25 intercontinental mobile missiles are either confined like sitting ducks to their 40 garrisons where they would be readily destroyed wholesale by a small number of U.S. nuclear warheads, or alternatively that nine or so out of the 291 would be out of garrison in the

The sensitivity analysis of degraded accuracy on target destruction is too circumscribed.

field but visible to U.S. surveillance satellites and thus vulnerable to complete obliteration by U.S. nuclear strikes. The trouble with this assumption is that it is not well documented and, in our estimation, is wrong.

Reality Testing

In our own research in this area, knowledgeable experts with access to intelligence sources disclosed that at least one and often two regiments of SS-25s typically operated in the field at any one time, and sometimes (though rarely) three regiments.¹⁶ We would not rule out the possibility that all of Russia's SS-25 missiles are occasionally confined to garrison for a period of time, though no public evidence substantiates such occurrences. If they did happen to be all clustered in garrison on a given day, however, it seems highly doubtful in the extreme that the United States would be waiting for just such a moment to mount a surprise nuclear attack. Such opportunism, devoid of any political context, is an artifact of mathematical modeling of nuclear exchanges, and cannot be taken seriously.

The same point applies to the model's alternative assumption about mobile missiles – that those in the field have been located by U.S. satellites, and thus also become sitting ducks. We agree with the professors and others, including Russian military analysts, that these mobile missiles may have detectable sig-

Alerting and arming of the U.S. strategic bomber force takes a minimum of 12 hours and is a 'noisy', and readily detectable process.

natures that compromise their location, but how often, for how long, and for how many of the missiles from the one, two, or three regiments in the field are open questions.¹⁷ Without stronger evidence than the professors provide, writing off this key Russian force is pre-mature and indefensible.

To a lesser degree, the same criticism applies to the model's dismissive treatment of Russian strategic submarines. These

boats completed three patrols in 2005, for an uncertain period of time in each case (the combat patrols lasted 78-days typically during the 1980s).¹⁸ While tracking Russian submarines on patrol is presumably much easier today than it was during the Cold War, writing them off as casualties of U.S. anti-submarine operations undertaken in concert with a first strike is not adequately supported by evidence and analysis.

The combination of these flawed or unsubstantiated assumptions – that the United States could generate practically its full nuclear armada undetected, and then strike opportunistically to destroy swiftly and completely all Russian sea- and land-based mobile strategic forces in garrison, in port, at sea, and hidden in the field – severely undermines the professors’ projection of total first-strike effectiveness. A completely disarming attack is simply not plausible. Absent solid corroborating evidence, their calculation of zero surviving Russian retaliatory forces should be adjusted upwards to between a handful and tens of surviving mobile strategic forces.

Together with other questionable assumptions – overly optimistic estimates of U.S. missile accuracy, overly pessimistic assessment of Russia’s ability to launch on warning, a static vulnerable Russian alert posture regardless of peacetime or crisis circumstances – their calculations further strain credulity and warrant further upward adjustment. Enough Russian nuclear firepower would survive to constitute at least a minimal deterrent force capable of inflicting such grave harm in retaliation that U.S. leaders would surely absolutely refrain from initiating an unprovoked preventive attack, and would reasonably consider launching a preemptive strike during a severe crisis only if they came to believe that a nuclear attack by Russia was imminent and unavoidable.

Longstanding Achilles Heel

The only first-strike attack scenario that could plausibly neutralize the ability of Russia to strike back in retaliation is one that the professors’ model consciously omits – the rapid suppression of the Russian command system. Decapitating the command hierarchy and severing communications links in order to prevent the issuance and dissemination of orders to launch Russian forces would stand a better chance of disarming Russia. The result of an optimal U.S. attack on the central nervous system of Russia’s nuclear arsenal could be stark: zero useable Russian retaliatory forces.¹⁹

The professors acknowledge this scenario and correctly emphasize that it only reinforces their characterization of the overpowering strength of U.S. offensive nuclear forces. However, the fact that Russian (and Soviet) command vulnerability is a longstanding weakness and potential source of crisis instability points to a glaring and fatal flaw in the professors’ argument: the stunning shift in the strategic nuclear balance actually occurred a long time ago.

Nuclear History Revisionism

The professors' contention that the era of mutual assured destruction has just ended with the rise of total U.S. superiority ignores the fact that MAD never existed as an operational policy on either the Russian or U.S. side. (It more closely approximates the Chinese stance.) Readers may remember that MAD is a two-sided version of assured destruction (AD), a cornerstone of deterrence logic that required an ability to absorb an opponent's maximum attack and strike back with devastating force in retaliation. Contrary to the Pentagon's assertion noted earlier that second-strike retaliation best describes U.S. nuclear policy, it has actually been a very long time since either Russia or the United States possessed any real confidence in their ability to retaliate after riding out a massive attack, because of the vulnerability of their individual forces but mainly because of the vulnerability of their command systems.²⁰

Both regarded AD as an infeasible operational concept, and long ago geared themselves for launch on warning or preemption. And hence in this crucial respect MAD has long been defunct, and thus the professors' warning that the era of MAD is ending is divorced from historical reality.

With respect to the acute vulnerability of individual Russian forces, the professors' argument also misses the historical mark by more than a decade. The collapse of the Russian strategic forces and the gross deterioration of its early warning network occurred when the Soviet Union broke apart in 1991. That is when Russia drastically curtailed submarine and mobile land

missile patrols, and when Russian missile silos became acutely vulnerable to a first strike by U.S. Peacekeeper (MX) missiles and soon after by Trident D-5 submarine missiles armed with W-88 warheads.²¹

Russia's strategic nuclear forces as well as its nuclear command and early warning system has declined somewhat more since the bottom fell out in the early 1990s, but the decline in recent years has occurred on

If the Russian strategic nuclear forces were acutely vulnerable 10-15 years ago, we can go back to a past future to test them.

the margins. Margins do count, but not enough in this case to support the professors' claim. Consider that over a decade ago the Russian submarine force was struggling to keep a single submarine on patrol at any given time. Typically a Delta IV in the Atlantic rotated off and on patrol with a Delta III

in the Pacific. The professors may be correct in their model's assumption that the United States could track and sink a solitary Russian submarine at sea today, but if so the United States could have performed this same feat over a decade ago. The public literature offers scant evidence of any recent breakthrough in the science and art of submarine trailing. By the same token, the Russian SS-25 force was struggling to keep one or two regiments out of garrison in the field at any time over a decade ago. Again, we have found no body of evidence to suggest any breakthrough in the ability of U.S. satellites to locate them in the field. If these missiles could be tracked and destroyed today, then they were no more survivable 10 years ago either. A nuclear barrage attack designed to saturate their operating areas, furthermore, was more feasible 10 years ago than today because of the larger U.S. arsenal then. Similarly, Russia's silo-based missile force stood no more chance of surviving a U.S. counterforce strike over a decade ago than it does today, and Russia's prospects of launch on warning were also no better then than now.

History Refutes the Primacy Predictions

If the Russian strategic nuclear forces were acutely vulnerable 10-15 years ago, then we do not have to wait to test the professors' dire predictions of the future. We can go back to a past future to test them.

The professors' predictions and hypotheses about the adverse implications of nuclear primacy in the future – fraying of nuclear relations, re-kindling of a nuclear arms race, heightened instability during a crisis, and increased risk of nuclear war – lend themselves to testing in the crucible of history. What actually happened after Russia's strategic collapse over a decade ago? Nothing remotely reminiscent of the theoretically predicted upheaval. Contrary to the professors' expectations, deterrence did not unravel; the imbalance did not lead to growing nuclear tensions or to a nuclear arms race and did not induce Russia or China to take destabilizing steps. The United States did not contemplate a preventive nuclear strike against Russia or China, nor did Russia or China become more poised than before to preempt in a crisis with America.

All sides all but ignored the theoretical first strike capability of the United States during the past 15 years (and much longer in the case of China). This history is not a perfect crucible for testing all of the professors' hypotheses, but the preponderance of evidence so far refutes their argument.

What this recent history really seems to be suggesting is that U.S. nuclear

primacy is an academic artifice that was and is practically useless for understanding America's relations with other nuclear powers. Nuclear primacy in modern times offers no exploitable political leverage. Russia and China appear quite confident in their deterrent arsenals in spite of the lopsided U.S. advantage estimated by models of nuclear war.

China Repudiates the Primacy Concept

The deficiencies of standard nuclear calculations of the sort performed by the professors are abundantly evident in the case of China. The Chinese nuclear story cannot be explained in Western theoretical terms, and requires a radically different interpretation. Compared to the Russian case, the history of nuclear relations between China and the United States shows a much starker imbalance favoring the United States (in narrow technical respects and in Western theoretical terms) over a much longer period of time. And yet virtually none of the destabilizing effects postulated by Western stability theory materialized during or after the Cold War. (Such effects did materialize in the case of Sino-Soviet nuclear relations, which were also marked by a stark imbalance favoring Russia.)

On the contrary, as discussed next, China never wavered from its no-first-use (NFU) doctrine and its belief that a small arsenal would suffice to prevent nuclear blackmail by the superpowers.²²

China's nuclear strategy is composed of primarily two parts: no-first-use²³ and "houfazhiren"²⁴ or the second-strike operation. The latter is a delayed, limited retaliatory nuclear attack to destroy an enemy's soft targets after China absorbs an enemy's first nuclear attack. This defensive strategy does not aim to build an arsenal to dominate, but instead to defend and to deter. China built the bomb to preclude nuclear blackmail and coercion.²⁵ This policy places no value on achieving nuclear parity with anyone. If we examine the history, the gap between China and the United States in terms of nuclear force was intentionally designed and maintained for four decades. China did not revamp its arsenal or NFU policy and the self-defense principle of its nuclear strategy for reasons particular to its historical environment and its own view of the utility of nuclear weapons. Many have argued that it was China's deliberate choice from the outset to absorb a possible first nuclear strike by its enemies, to build a rather small strategic force and not to pursue a launch on warning capability.²⁶ China's nuclear doctrine also was and is still based on strong moral

considerations that even more strictly confined the role of nuclear weapons to second-strike deterrence (as opposed to the United States and Russia who have both considered using them for a first strike).

The belief Mao Zedong possessed was that China will not invade other countries, and that no other countries could conquer China with or without nuclear weapons because of its vast territorial expanse and challenging terrain. Mao believed that nuclear weapons would not prevent China's eventual victory in a war fought on Chinese soil.

The logic of China's nuclear doctrine thus regarded the use of nuclear weapons against China as ineffective, and therefore so improbable as to be virtually impossible, and therefore insignificant as a source of strategic advantage. China's calculus for "unbearable loss" and China's capacity to absorb a first nuclear strike differed completely from that of the United States²⁷ "The second strike capability" China marshals reassures it that other strategic powers cannot convert their nuclear superiority into real coercive power. In the view of Chinese leaders, superiority is not convertible. At best, any advantage gained would be small and virtually inconsequential.

China not only completely discounts the utility of nuclear primacy, but also believes that other nuclear powers share its view in spite of the lip service those powers pay to the importance of nuclear weapons. China simply does not believe others truly believe nuclear primacy can serve utilitarian purposes.²⁸

China's experiences in dealing with U.S. nuclear threats have only strengthened its conviction that nuclear primacy has negligible utility. The United States considered using nuclear weapons against China in 1953 during the Korean War, in 1954-1955 during the cross-strait crises, and in 1964 before China carried out its first nuclear test. These cases in which U.S. leaders clearly thought about using nuclear weapons against China but ultimately decided against it reveal a multitude of reasons for counseling against their use. A nuclear taboo was ascendant at the time. Allies of the United States would oppose their use. Attacking China would create a vacuum for an even more hostile adversary, the Soviet Union, to occupy. Attacking China could not guarantee the destruction of China's fledgling nuclear program, due to sketchy information on the location of facilities in China's nuclear infrastructure. Without the ability to achieve total victory and

MAD never existed as an operational policy.

occupy China, the United States could not prevent China from rebuilding any destroyed facilities and revitalizing its nuclear program. The United States had better choices, especially given China's flexibility in negotiating and compromising in resolving conflicts with the United States.²⁹

The professors ignore Cold War history in arguing that the nuclear primacy the United States allegedly enjoys will drive China toward a rapid build-up of its nuclear force that risks precipitating a nuclear arms race and aggravating tensions between them. Throughout the Cold War era, even when China was threatened repeatedly by both the United States and the Soviet Union with nuclear weapons and possibility of military confrontation, both of whom held absolute nuclear superiority over China, China did not accelerate its nuclear program to close the gap. An unflinching China chose to cap its nuclear arsenal at a low level instead of launching a crash program to compete numerically with either of the nuclear superpowers that threatened it. This decision may have been partially based on the realization that China lacked the resources

China's policy places no value on achieving nuclear parity with anyone.

needed to compete and would lose an arms race with its adversaries. But the deeper rationale for China's restraint was its belief that primacy lacked any real utility. China maintained and still maintains a stark indifference toward nuclear primacy.

China's real concern about threats to its nuclear deterrent capability stems not from nuclear primacy, as the two professors argue, but from U.S. conventional primacy. The increasing accuracy and lethality of the American conventional strike capability is tipping the strategic balance and eroding China's deterrent force.³⁰ China's past assumption that its second-strike deterrent against U.S. blackmail can only be eviscerated by a U.S. nuclear strike is rapidly crumbling. A U.S. strike by its conventional precision-guided cruise missiles and gravity bombs delivered by strategic submarines and bombers, and in the future by ICBMs, against China's small nuclear force would circumvent the nuclear taboo. Conventional strikes that destroy China's nuclear deterrent capability are regarded by the Chinese as far more practical and less risky for the United States than a nuclear strike would be. And the effectiveness of such conventional strikes could be high. The United States is on the verge of posing a disarming first strike conventional threat against all of China's strategic nuclear forces. It is this prospect, and not nuclear primacy, that appears to be putting some real pressure on Chinese strategists

to revoke China's longstanding commitment to NFU.

Two additional risks that China's nuclear force is facing include the possible perfection of the U.S. missile defense system and emerging new nuclear states in China's neighborhood.³¹ Missile defense represents a potential risk because, although most experts seriously doubt it will ever succeed technically, it circumvents the nuclear taboo in the same way that conventional offensive forces do. Therefore U.S. missile defense counts seriously as a strategic factor in the deterrent equation. As for regional proliferation dangers to China, the scenario of immediate concern is that North Korea's nuclear test will drive Japan to develop a nuclear force, or worse a Japanese nuclear force that surpasses China's planned force. This would exert domestic political pressure on China's nuclear program and strategy, fueled by nationalistic impulses and energized by the "face factor" that Chinese will not allow Japan to get ahead in a nuclear build-up. A vigorous nuclear competition between China and Japan could occur even while the U.S. and Russian arsenals are shrinking.

These risks are not illuminated by the primacy model, which also neglects a key feature of China's decision process: a headstrong determination to preserve its national unity even if doing so runs nuclear risks that a rationally calculating player would avoid.

Some Chinese scholars have argued that because there is an imbalance of interest for Chinese and Americans in Taiwan, the United States would be more inclined to back away from a nuclear confrontation.³² China thus might believe that the nuclear taboo would restrain the United States more than China. Rationally calculating players might apply such logic in their nuclear gamesmanship, but there is not only high risk of miscalculating the other side's degree of commitment. There is also an element of sheer craziness or stubbornness that defies calculation in the case of a Sino-American showdown over Taiwan. The rational primacy framework at least appears to vastly overrate America's coercive leverage over China in such a showdown.

In all calculations of nuclear primacy and deterrence, the players are assumed to be rational. However, rational actors might lapse into irrational behavior in readily imaginable ways that are completely obtuse to the nuclear primacy framework. The obvious scenario in this regard concerns the defeat of China's military force in a potential Taiwan conflict. The Taiwan issue has been a core national interest of China, one that arouses such fervent emotions throughout the country that irrational behavior in its use of nuclear weapons

cannot be ruled out.

It is a consensus among Chinese military and civilian analysts that China needs to modernize its nuclear force to increase its survivability and penetration capability. There are debates over whether China should pursue a more symmetrical build-up of nuclear force to counter challenges mentioned above by increasing the number of nuclear weapons and nuclear bases. But the NFU commitment remains solid. Very few analysts advocate any revision of the doctrine that would make it conditional. After the controversy generated by Maj. Gen. Zhu Chenghu in 2005, who allegedly invoked the specter of Chinese first use of nuclear weapons in the event of United States intervention in a hypothetical Taiwan conflict, a considerable number of Chinese nuclear strategists and senior military officers stepped forward to disavow Zhu's scenario and reiterate strongly the unconditional nature of China's NFU nuclear policy. This policy may not be immutable. No doubt future internal debate will grapple with the challenges to China's strategic force and its nuclear doctrine posed by missile defense systems and conventional weapons advances. But the Zhu incident only renewed and revalidated the old consensus and policy against changing China's nuclear doctrine. NFU will not be dislodged any time soon, if ever. It is virtually a canon of Chinese nuclear orthodoxy.

Conclusion

The nuclear primacy thesis and analysis have served as useful reminders that obsolete Cold War nuclear dynamics remain in play. The United States and Russia in particular still operate their nuclear forces as though they must be constantly prepared to fight a large-scale nuclear war with each other on a moment's notice. There is no political context to explain this continuing deterrent operation, but the two previous nuclear rivals remain trapped in their habitual practices from the Cold War era.

The primacy argument, however, does not withstand close scrutiny for three major reasons. First, the contention that the era of mutual assured destruction has ended with the emergence of a unipolar nuclear hegemon misses the fact that MAD never existed as an operational policy on either side. Second, the claim that a stunning shift in the strategic balance has just now occurred misses the fact that the tectonic moment actually occurred 15 years ago when the Soviet Union collapsed and sapped its nuclear strength in the process. Third, Russia's sudden nuclear decline did not result in the kind

and intensity of instability that the professors' theory predicts should have occurred, and therefore the theory is not valid.

The professors' thesis does not come to grips with the evident truth that nuclear security is more a state of mind than a physical condition, and that through their mental prisms Russian and Chinese nuclear strategists have come to believe that deterring the United States is easy to achieve with very small numbers of nuclear weapons that have some conceivable prospect of surviving an attack. And Russia and China are not alone. Countries like North Korea and Iran also appear to share this belief – that all it takes are a few hidden nuclear bombs to offset the U.S. nuclear juggernaut. U.S. strategists themselves appear to belong to this school of thought. The United States is easily deterred by any nuclear armed state, even by the most primitive and diminutive of nuclear arsenals. That is why the United States goes to such extraordinary lengths to prevent adversaries from acquiring even one solitary bomb in the first place. Once acquired, the deterrence game is fundamentally altered at the expense of U.S. military options and political leverage.

***The primacy framework
vastly overrates
America's coercive
leverage over China in a
showdown over Taiwan.***

In short, the marginal utility of nuclear weapons is high for low numbers and low for high numbers. Similarly, the marginal utility of gaining the ability to project possible retaliation is much higher than the marginal utility of gaining the upper hand of a possible disarming first strike.

What U.S. leaders really value and seek today in the military sphere is not nuclear but rather conventional primacy. For all the drama and controversy surrounding the nuclear rhetoric of the Bush administration, the bunker buster and 'reliable replacement warhead' programs, the deeper historical current of U.S. policy is to downgrade nuclear and upgrade conventional roles, missions, and capabilities. All of the branches of the U.S. military including the Strategic Command grasp this trend and have been casting about for new conventional missions in lieu of nuclear – for instance, Strategic Command's bringing information warfare and space under its umbrella.

The professors' preoccupation with U.S.-Russian-Chinese nuclear deterrence and their use of an obsolete Cold War formulation of stability only impedes new thinking and answers to today's real nuclear challenges. Their

formulation reinforces the tendency of current nuclear strategists to overstate the utility of U.S. military strength in countering nuclear threats, and to understate its counter-productive effects. U.S. nuclear (or conventional for that matter) primacy hardly addresses the asymmetrical warfare conducted by weaker states and terrorist organizations, which constitutes a more real and lethal threat to Americans. This threat is less visible and full-bodied than the awesome Cold War rivals presented by Russia or China, but it is also less impressed by U.S. primacy and thus more problematic.

The misplaced focus on ‘normal’ deterrable threats in the form of Russia and China fosters a kind of transference of faith in military solutions to threats that are too slippery to handle with standard military force. This overconfidence in and over-reliance on military solutions to emerging proliferation dangers appears in fact to have created more problems than it has solved. Notwithstanding the Pentagon’s criticism of the professors’ argument, they all share a common worldview that revolves around military power despite its sharp limitations, and oft-proven dysfunctionality. The resort to nuclear force as articulated in the 2002 Nuclear Posture Review and other official statements of U.S. strategy in recent years convey an aggressive message that works not to reduce but increase the threat to the United States.

If history teaches us anything, nuclear superiority has hardly cleansed the world of America’s enemies. Opposite approaches based on arms control and security reassurances instead of projection of military threat have generally been far more effective – for instance, U.S. leadership in building a non-proliferation regime that provides security for non-nuclear states has limited the number of countries possessing nuclear weapons. The world is changing and in many ways is growing more menacing, but nuclear primacy is an irrelevant reference point. Or worse, it is a misguided, even self-destructive one that diminishes America’s ability to set the best course for its security. ☹

Notes

¹ Keir A. Lieber and Daryl G. Press, “The Rise of U.S. Nuclear Primacy,” *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 85, No. 2, March/April 2006, pp. 42-54;

“The End of MAD? The Nuclear Dimension of U.S. Primacy,” *International Security*, Vol. 30, No.4, Spring 2006, pp. 7-44.

² This section is based on the criticism and rejoinder by Peter C. W. Flory, Keith Payne, Pavel Podvig, Alexei Arbatov, Keir A. Lieber and Daryl G. Press, “Nuclear Exchange: Does Washington Really have (or Want) Nuclear Primacy?” *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 85, No. 3, September/October 2006.

³ Flory, *ibid.*

⁴ Payne, *ibid.*

⁵ Lieber and Press, *ibid.*

⁶ Bruce G. Blair, *Global Zero Alert for Nuclear Forces*, Brookings, 1995, pp. 72; see also Bruce G. Blair, *The Logic of Accidental Nuclear War*, Brookings, 1993, pp. 52-55.

⁷ Interview with former senior U.S. nuclear target planner.

⁸ Blair, *The Logic of Accidental Nuclear War*, *op. cit.*

⁹ See the interview with General (Ret.) George Lee Butler in Jonathan Schell, *The Gift of Time: The Case for Abolishing Nuclear Weapons Now*, Metropolitan Books, 1998, pp. 191-94.

¹⁰ Blair, *Global Zero Alert for Nuclear Forces*, *op. cit.*, pp. 60-72.

¹¹ On original assessment of these problems, see Theodore A. Postol, *The Nuclear Danger from Shortfalls in the Capabilities of Russian Early Warning Satellites*, MIT Security Studies Program, March 1998; See also David Hoffman, “Russian Myopic Missile Defense,” *The Washington Post*, Feb 10, 1999, p. A1.

¹² Podvig, *op. cit.*

¹³ See Col. (ret.) Valery E. Yarynich, *Nuclear Command, Control Cooperation*, Center for Defense Information, Washington, D.C., May 2003, esp. pp. 139-66.

¹⁴ Blair, *The Logic of Accidental Nuclear War*, *op. cit.*, pp. 154-55.

¹⁵ Bruce G. Blair, “De-alerting Strategic Nuclear Forces,” in Harold A. Feiveson, ed., *The Nuclear Turning Point: A Blueprint for Deep Cuts and De-Alerting of Nuclear Weapons*, Brookings, 1999, pp. 117-18.

¹⁶ Personal communications with first author.

¹⁷ Russian experts apprehension about mobile missile vulnerabilities is detailed in Blair, *Global Zero Alert for Nuclear Forces*, *op. cit.*, pp. 64-67.

¹⁸ Personal communication of Robert S. Norris and Hans M. Kristensen, Natural Resources Defense Council, with authors.

¹⁹ “The Soviet military has indeed performed classified computer simulation that have produced the worst possible results: decapitation and total paralysis of the

Soviet strategic forces.” In Blair, *Global Zero Alert for Nuclear Forecast*, op. cit., pp. 45.

²⁰ See Bruce G. Blair, *Strategic Command and Control: Redefining the Nuclear Threat* (Brookings, 1985); Blair, *The Logic of Accidental Nuclear War*, op. cit.

²¹ For a detailed assessment of Russia’s operational decline during the 1990s, see Blair, *Global Zero Alert for Nuclear Forces*, op. cit., esp. pp. 64; Bruce G. Blair, “The Plight of the Russian Military and Nuclear Control,” in *Commission to Assess the Ballistic Missile Threat to the United States*, Appendix 3, July 15, 1998, esp. pp. 44-45; Bruce G. Blair and Clifford Gaddy, “Russia’s Aging War Machine: Economic Weakness and the Nuclear Threat,” *Brookings Review* 17, No 3, Summer 1999; and Blair, “De-alerting Strategic Nuclear Forces,” op. cit., esp. pp. 109.

²² For a recent discussion of China’s nuclear policy, see articles by General (ret.) Pan Zhenqiang, Shen Dingli, Sun Xiangli and Bruce G. Blair in the special issue of *China Security* devoted to “Opening the Debates on U.S.-China Nuclear Relations,” No. 1, Autumn 2005.

²³ “China will never be the first to use nuclear weapons at any time and under any circumstance,” according to the Chinese Government Statement on Oct 16, 1964 republished in Deng Xueyuan, *Nuclear Forces and Policies of Nuclear States*, Military Sciences Press, 1991, pp. 170-172; Nie Rongzhen, *Nie Rongzhen Memoir*, PLA Press, 1986.

²⁴ “Houfazhiren”, in direct translation “to gain mastery by striking only after the enemy has struck first”; “Strategic nuclear weapons, deterrence, could scare others a bit but we can never use it first. However, it (nuclear weapons) will play a role if we have it.” “If we have what you (enemy) have, this will put pressure (on enemies); if you (enemies) want to destroy us, you (enemies) will have to face some retaliation.” Mao Zedong, quoted by Lu Haixiao of the Chinese Academy of Military Sciences in “Analysis of Mao Zedong’s Strategic Deterrence Thinking,” *Journal of Xi’an Politics Institute*, Vol. 15, No. 3, June 2002; Houfazhiren is also explained as carrying out “limited nuclear retaliation at a time and against targets of Beijing’s own choosing” after enemy’s nuclear attack. See the quote of Yin Weixing who works in the Political Department of the Second Artillery in John Wilson Lewis and Xue Litai, *China Builds the Bomb*, Stanford University Press, 1988, esp. pp. 214-17; Chong-Pin Lin, *China’s Nuclear Weapons Strategy*, Lexington Books, 1988, pp. 105-135.

²⁵ Chen Lixu, “Implication of Nuclear Weapons for Modern National Defense Deterrence”, *Mao Zedong Thought Forum (Changsha)*, No. 4, 1995, pp 80-82.

²⁶ Sun Xiangli, “Analysis of China’s Nuclear Strategy,” *China Security*, No. 1, Autumn 2005, pp 23-27; Li Bin, “Identifying China’s Nuclear Strategy,” *World Economics and Politics*, No. 9, 2006, pp. 16-22; China National Nuclear Corporation, “Mao Zedong and China’s Nuclear Energy Enterprise,” Nuclear Power Press, 1993.

²⁷ Sun Xiangli, *ibid*; Li Bin, “Identifying China’s Nuclear Strategy,” *ibid*, pp. 20.

²⁸ Mao Zedong, *Mao Zedong Essays on Foreign Policy*, Chinese Central Literature &

Education Press, 1994.

²⁹ See Richard K. Betts, *Nuclear Blackmail and Nuclear Balance* (Brookings, 1989); Zhu Mingquan, "China Was Frightened to Step Back by U.S. Nuclear Threats: A Myth or History?" *Fudan Journal (Social Sciences)*, No. 1, 2001; Zhan Xin, Analysis of the American Evaluation and Countermeasures towards China's Nuclear Weapon Research and Development (1961-1964), *Contemporary China History Studies*, Vol. 8, No. 3, May 2001; FRUS: 1964-1968, Vol XXX, China, pp. 27; Zhao Xuegong, "Nuclear Weapons and American Policy towards the First Taiwan Straits Crisis," *American Studies*, Issue No. 2, 2004; Yu Jiang Xin, "Nuclear Policy of the United States in Korean War," *Military History*, No.5, 2005.

³⁰ See Bruce G. Blair, Eric Hundeman and Haninah Levine, "The U.S. Conventional Threat to China's Nuclear Deterrent," *China Security* (Forthcoming); Yang Yi, Guo Xinning and Xu Qiyu, *Studies of Global Strategic Stability*, National Defense University Press, 2005, pp. 130, 145,

³¹ He Zuoxiu, "Analysis of China's No-First-Use Nuclear Strategy," *Journal of Dialectics of Nature*, No. 1, 1989.

³² Lin Guojiong, "Deterrence Theory and Its Role in China's Reunification", *Studies of International Politics*, No. 4, April 2004.

Paper Tiger with Whitened Teeth

Li Bin

*Military matters are of vital importance to the state,
and may lead to survival or ruin.*

*Hence they are subjects of inquiry,
which can on no account be neglected.*

-Sun Tzu¹

In a recently published paper, authors Keir Lieber and Daryl Press provided a provocative analysis on the evolving nuclear relations of the United States with Russia and China. The authors concluded that “[for] the first time in decades, [the United States] could conceivably disarm the long-range nuclear arsenals of Russia or China with a nuclear first strike.”² This potentially new nuclear status of the United States is referred to as “nuclear primacy.” The authors also determine that U.S. nuclear primacy “may give U.S. leaders’ coercive leverage over adversaries in future high-stakes crises...” This

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situation brings to mind the words of Sun Tzu who clearly warns us that on military matters one should exercise extreme caution. The gravity of strategic issues between nuclear powers and their implications are matters of life and death; therefore, it is necessary to closely scrutinize these issues' analysis and claims and to challenge the conclusions if warranted.

In their analysis of America's impending nuclear primacy vis-à-vis China, the authors Lieber and Press are wrong in two fundamental ways. First, the reasoning by which they arrive at their conclusions is faulty; and second, the implications of their conclusions are incorrect on several counts. The more serious problem arises, however, if U.S. decision-makers believe in American nuclear primacy as a reality. Any action as a result of a reliance on this false belief would lead to disaster for America and the rest of the world.

The Problem of Intelligence

Using their models, Lieber and Press concluded that zero Russian long-range nuclear weapons would survive in a surprise U.S. nuclear strike. The sensitivity analysis in this paper suggests that the resulting "zero" target survivability is very robust. That is, reductions in the accuracy and reliability of U.S. nuclear weapons as well as a further hardening of Russian silos would still not alter the expected zero survivability. As for China, which has far fewer nuclear weapons than Russia, the United States would be able to eliminate all of China's nuclear weapons with even greater certainty in a surprise nuclear strike. Furthermore, the authors contend that America has a distinct technical edge over Russia and China in nuclear weaponry, ensuring that zero target survivability will be unchangeable for the foreseeable future. On the other hand, the uncertainties raised in their thesis are minor; suggesting for instance that a U.S. submarine commander might not receive, or might not believe, his launch orders. However, they conclude with the warning that it would be unwise for Russia and China to pin their hopes on enemy weapons platforms underperforming.

The authors' calculations are not surprising. Basic arithmetic alone will certify that thousands of nuclear missiles should be able to destroy a couple dozen immobile intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs). But this calculus has existed for a long time. The authors would have done better to question why they are the first to discuss China's vulnerability to zero target survivability. The Chinese leaders do not feel a sense of panic about the scarcity of

Chinese immobile ICBMs and do not rush to increase their number when in fact they have the capability and the means to do so. Why, the authors might have asked themselves, does China remain comfortable with its small and low-alert nuclear arsenal? As Lieber and Press state in their paper:

“...[China’s] strategic arsenal is growing at a glacial pace. China has only 18 ICBMs, a number that has remained essentially unchanged for more than a decade. In addition, these missiles are kept un-fueled, and their warheads are stored separately.”

Rather than exploring why China chooses to do so, Lieber and Press use this fact as evidence to support their point on U.S. nuclear primacy.³ If the authors paid more heed to China’s choice of a small and low-alert nuclear arsenal they would find their deductions faulty, including technical problems in their calculations. All the calculations in their paper, including the sensitivity analyses, focus on the hardness of the targets as well as strike capabilities, which are determined by the lethal distance, accuracy, and reliability of U.S. nuclear weapons. However, the calculations in the paper are based on a fundamentally unrealistic assumption: that is, the United States can detect and locate all Russian and Chinese long-range nuclear weapons. The authors never state this assumption in their paper – perhaps unknowingly so, as most former calculations do not discuss the issue of target detection. In other previous studies, where the numbers of surviving nuclear weapons in a calculation are much larger than zero, it may be alright to ignore the factor of intelligence.

But, if such a calculation gives a result of almost zero surviving targets in a nuclear exchange, the intelligence factor becomes highly salient and therefore cannot be ignored.

The authors understand that “... one surviving mobile ICBM might destroy a U.S. city ...” So their sensitivity analysis tries to prove that no single Russian long-

range nuclear weapon can survive even if the U.S. nuclear weapons are not as effective as assumed. However, the real problem is that if the United States does not know where some nuclear weapons are in Russia or China, the United

***With near zero
surviving targets in
a nuclear exchange,
the intelligence factor
becomes highly salient.***

States cannot destroy them even with superior numbers and performance of nuclear weapons.

It is instructive to know that once the Soviet Union (and later, Russia) felt that it had a sufficient number of nuclear weapons to survive a first U.S. nuclear strike, it chose to sign the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaties (START) I and II that entail on-site inspections to verify the numbers and locations of the Russian long-range nuclear weapons. If Russia feels that not a single one of its nuclear weapons can survive a first strike by the United States, it may consider not revealing all its nuclear weapons to the United States. In fact, unlike the START treaties, the new Moscow Treaty does not require similar on-site inspections.

It is evident, even more so in China's case, that it has never declared the number or location of its nuclear weapons. Naturally, the United States relies on its intelligence to identify and locate China's nuclear weapons and then uses this information to decipher which objects and how many objects appear to be nuclear weapons and where they are located. The calculations in their paper do prove that the United States can destroy all the objects that have been identified by U.S. intelligence as nuclear weapons. However, the paper misses the central point of whether the entirety of Chinese long-range nuclear weapons have been identified and located by U.S. intelligence or whether all the objects that are identified in China are real nuclear weapons. The paper simply omits possible deficiencies of intelligence.

Furthermore, the performance of U.S. intelligence in the first Iraq war and the Kosovo war suggests that the United States may miss more than just a few large military targets. Technically speaking, it is a relatively simple countermeasure for China to conceal a few actual ICBMs and to deploy decoy missiles – given the large size of the Chinese territory. No matter how the United States increases the number, accuracy, and reliability of its nuclear weapons, even if used in a surprise attack, it has no means of destroying those Chinese ICBMs that its intelligence has not found. Thus, there is no method or model by which Lieber and Press can determine with any certainty that the number of surviving Chinese ICBMs after a surprise U.S. strike (equal to the number of undetected Chinese ICBMs) will be zero, and it seems far more likely survivability would be greater than zero. The definitive conclusion that the surviving Chinese ICBMs must be zero is technically wrong as it omits the intelligence deficiency.

The uncertainties of the calculations in the paper are much greater and much more serious than indicated by the authors, and certainly goes beyond their single scenario of an enemy target surviving because a U.S. submarine commander does not believe his launch order. However, the greatest concern is that U.S. leaders actually believe that zero retaliation from China is possible, as predicted by Lieber and Press, and behave incautiously. Zero retaliation is an illusion, and if taken seriously it would bring dire risks to the United States.

The Conditions of Coercion

The Lieber and Press thesis speculates that the United States may attain coercive power over its adversaries in a crisis if a position of nuclear primacy is achieved. The paper, however, does not explain how the United States would transfer its superior nuclear position into signals of threat in order to coerce others. Let us be very clear that it is thoroughly implausible that the United States would use its nuclear weapons to force other countries to yield to it in economic, social or cultural disputes. If it chose to do so, it would fail for two basic reasons. First, power and influence generated in one realm (nuclear primacy) is not necessarily transferable to another realm (economic or other). Second, the threat of using nuclear weapons for such ends would be abhorrent to Americans and the world. Rather, the coercive power of nuclear weapons, if real, should be effective only in serious security disputes - and are therefore the only scope for discussion. Moreover, if Lieber and Press expect that nuclear primacy enables the United States to coerce other countries in security disputes, they need to explain how the United States would send coercive signals and how its rivals would interpret the signals.

In a scenario where the goal of the United States is to force a country to yield in a security dispute using the fear of American nuclear superiority, an important question arises: how would a country know whether the nuclear threats from the United States are real and consequently whether to withdraw from their previous position? The United States would need to make known at a certain stage in the dispute: (1) its security objectives in relation to its adversary; and (2) the threat of possibly using nuclear weapons against its adversary if it does not yield its position. The response by the adversary is important here for it may or may not take seriously the nuclear threats by the United States. If the adversary does not take such threats seriously, then

they would not feel the necessity to yield and therefore coercion would not work. To clearly reveal its security objectives and convince its adversary that the nuclear threat is credible, the United States would have to send out very strong signals of threat, for example, upgrading its nuclear readiness. If the adversary does take the U.S. nuclear threat seriously, it can raise its nuclear alert accordingly and thereby increase the survivability of its nuclear weapons.

Preemption or Prevention

The Lieber and Press paper tries to prove that the United States can destroy all Russian or Chinese long-range nuclear weapons in a surprise preventive nuclear strike in peacetime. But in any security dispute some form of threat signaling is necessary. For example, after Russia receives strong signals of a nuclear threat from the United States, it may disperse its mobile ICBMs and nuclear submarines or launch its silo-based ICBMs when its early warning systems detect even unclear signals of incoming warheads. China may relocate its cave-based ICBMs when it interprets strong nuclear signals by the United States. These efforts can reduce the effectiveness of the preemptive U.S. nuclear strike and therefore make the number of survivable Russian and Chinese long-range nuclear weapons greater than zero. In fact, the authors acknowledge that “(a) preemptive strike on an alerted Russian arsenal would still likely fail, but a surprise attack at peacetime alert levels would have a reasonable chance of success.”

In this way, the United States faces a dilemma: ensuring that not a single Russian or Chinese long-range nuclear weapon survives its nuclear strike can only be achieved in the absence of an alert and therefore nuclear coercion cannot work. On the other hand, if it wants to coerce Russia or China in a serious security dispute, it needs to send very strong signals of nuclear threat that would invariably reduce the effectiveness of its nuclear strike and therefore undermine its coercive power. To solve this dilemma, the United States needs to develop a fully disarming capability of preemptive nuclear strike in crises, not only a fully disarming capability of preventive nuclear strike in peacetime. The Lieber and Press paper mistakenly links the preventive capability

How would the U.S. would send coercive signals and how would its rivals interpret the signals.

in peacetime to coercive power in crises. This is misleading. Coercive power in crises, if real, should mainly come from preemptive strike capability, along with serious threat signals beforehand.

It could be true that preventive capability in peacetime might create coercive power in dissuading nuclear proliferation. The expectation in such a scenario would be that the United States could launch a surprise nuclear strike against the emerging nuclear state in peacetime and destroy all the components of its nuclear program. If the emerging nuclear state has no way to hide its nuclear components and worries about the consequences of a strike, it might be persuaded to give up development of a nuclear weapons program. Even if the United States could achieve this dissuasive ability, however, it cannot be applied to Russia or China as they have been beyond this stage for a long time.

The relation between the levels of disarming capability and the types of coercive power is illustrated in Figure 1. The disarming capability of preemptive strike in crisis may help build coercive power in crisis while a disarming capability of preventive strike in peacetime may help build nonproliferation coercive power in peacetime. The two forms of coercive power lie in different realms.

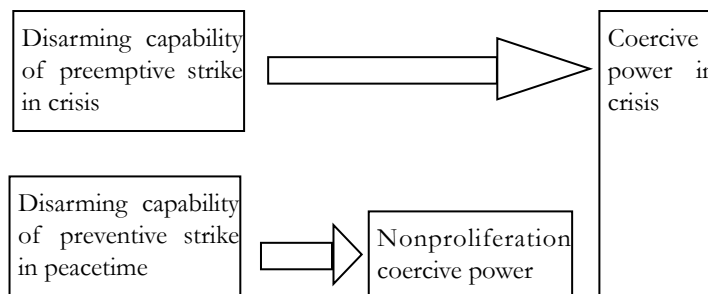


Figure 1: Levels of Disarming Capability and Forms of Coercive Power

As Lieber and Press suggest, some believe it may be an attractive goal for the United States to develop coercive power over Russia and China in a crisis. However, this kind of coercive power requires a disarming capability of preemptive strike in crisis, which is much more difficult than the disarming capability of surprise strike in peacetime, as calculated in the paper. In a crisis, adversaries can raise the survivability of their retaliatory weapons by raising

the alert status of these weapons. Thus, the United States would not have the coercive power suggested by the paper unless it raises its strike capability to a much higher level.

New Nuclear Coercive Power?

Lieber and Press largely circumvent a discussion about what the United States would actually do if its leaders believed that it had achieved nuclear primacy. Throughout the paper, the authors suggest that the United States may only make use of the influence gained by nuclear primacy without actually launching the weapons. On the other hand, in the section where they criticize the constructivist's nuclear taboo theory, the authors try to prove that U.S. leaders can certainly launch a nuclear attack if the coercive goal cannot be reached. These incompatible arguments are understandable. The taboo against using nuclear weapons, as a social norm, is deeply embedded in modern society.⁴ People who accept the norm feel deep unease, even guilt, with the mere suggestion of the use of nuclear weapons. The undertones throughout the paper clearly reveal a sense of disquietude regarding the use of nuclear weapons even though they criticize the theory of nuclear taboo. They avoid directly suggesting that the United States would launch a nuclear attack if the coercion fails. But if the United States does not plan to launch nuclear attacks after its coercion fails, the coercion would be non-credible and could not work. According to Kissinger's measurement of deterrence, a special kind of coercion, the effectiveness of coercion depends not only on the strength of the force but also the determination to use force.⁵ To prove that the United States can build coercive leverage based on its nuclear primacy, the paper needs to convince people that the United States has the determination to use its nuclear force if coercion fails.

A question might arise as to whether the Chinese should be frightened by the threat of nuclear attack from the United States in any scenario where the United States sends a new coercive signal. If the United States would use nuclear weapons after its coercion fails, then the Chinese might believe that U.S. nuclear weapons are not a paper tiger, but the real thing. If not, U.S. nuclear weapons capability, even in a position of

The authors mistakenly link preventive capability in peacetime to coercive power in crisis.

primacy, remains a paper tiger, even though it may have whiter teeth, as the metaphor goes. Whether nuclear weapons will be used in a given situation depends on many factors. Certainly, there is no doubt that the United States will launch a nuclear retaliatory strike if the United States or one of its close

U.S. nuclear primacy has a strong negative effect on controlling nuclear escalation.

allies comes under nuclear attack. This is the so-called minimum nuclear deterrence and extended deterrence to its allies.

The Lieber and Press paper also raises the concern that China might use nuclear weapons to destroy American cities if the United States supports the separatists in Taiwan in a war for separation, a suggestion

which arose from a Chinese military scholar.⁶ In fact, a more accurate interpretation of this comment is that China could extend its nuclear deterrence to dissuade mass conventional attack from the United States in a Sino-U.S. war over Taiwan. The idea is that China could compensate for its conventional inferiority vis-à-vis the United States by adding the influence of nuclear weapons. However, the United States should not be concerned about this for two reasons. First, China's leaders fully understand that nuclear weapons are a paper tiger in this kind of conventional conflict. No matter who is defeated in conventional war (if it ever came to that), neither China nor the United States would be able to alter the outcome using nuclear weapons. The second reason is that to deter a nuclear attack (minimum deterrence) does not require nuclear primacy. A retaliatory nuclear force larger than the base criterion described by Robert McNamara should be sufficient for this purpose.⁷ The coercive power of minimum nuclear deterrence (detering others from using nuclear weapons) has been held by the United States for over half a century. If the United States would achieve nuclear primacy today, it would make little contribution to the U.S. minimum nuclear deterrence.

Lieber and Press seem to suggest that the United States has some new kind of coercive power, but they do not specify what that new power is. The paper correctly asserts that the U.S. disarming capability of surprise nuclear attack in peacetime may worsen the dynamic of nuclear escalation. As noted above, raising alert levels of China's (or Russia's) nuclear force would be decisive for its survivability and so the incentive to do so under the conditions of nuclear primacy would be strong. Consequently, U.S. nuclear primacy has a strong negative effect on controlling nuclear escalation.

There are two kinds of coercive power that might be new and relevant to China. The first is an extended deterrent power that aims to dissuade China from punishing separatists in Taiwan and/or stop China from heavily beating U.S. conventional forces involved in the war. If the United States has any coercive power over China on the Taiwan issue it comes from U.S. economic and conventional superiority over China rather than nuclear dominance. U.S. nuclear superiority has never and will never stop China from defending its security interests. The United States once sent coercive signals to China during the Korean War threatening the use of nuclear weapons. China's leader at the time, Mao Zedong, simply treated the threatening signals as a paper tiger, believing nuclear weapons could not be used.⁸ America's nuclear primacy at that time did not, either through the physical effects of nuclear weapons or their influence, stop China from sending military forces to the Korean Peninsula to resist the advance of the U.S. military. If the United States expects that its nuclear primacy would deter China from responding to the separation of Taiwan from China or from fighting against foreign military interference, it will be making a grave mistake. In addition, U.S. leaders will find that the nuclear taboo, in the sense of opposition to nuclear war from American people and the rest of the world, will bind them from acting on their nuclear threats in such a conventional conflict.

***U.S. nuclear superiority
will never stop China
from defending its
security interests.***

The second possible new form of coercive power is nuclear compellence, which in this scenario would presumably force China to accept an arrangement over Taiwan favorable to the United States. However, it is far more difficult to achieve a goal by nuclear compellence than nuclear deterrence.⁹ As noted above, the United States has little ability through nuclear deterrent power to dissuade China from militarily responding to an act of separation in Taiwan. It would have even less coercive power for compellence over China's interests and behavior with regard to the Taiwan issue.

Press and Lieber expect that U.S. nuclear primacy would provide it a new coercive power. As the paper does not provide convincing arguments that the United States would be more determined to launch nuclear attack when and if its new forms of coercions fail (as described above), there is little evidence

to conclude that the United States would have any new effective coercive power over China on the Taiwan issue.

The power pattern in the world has significantly changed since the end of the cold war. The United States is indeed in a new period of power expansion. However, nuclear weapons of the United States provide little contribution to its fast growing power. Lieber and Press are therefore wrong to predict that the United States would gain new coercive power. First, the United States cannot develop a fully disarming nuclear strike capability against Russia and China given its intelligence deficiency; second, a disarming capability of surprise attack in peacetime cannot generate coercive power in crisis given the difficulty of signaling; third, the United States cannot gain new nuclear coercive power as its new methods of using nuclear weapons are constrained by the nuclear taboo. In this new era, nuclear weapons essentially remain a paper tiger. U.S. nuclear modernization toward greater strike capability is just a whitening of the paper tiger's teeth. If more people in the world today understood that this fundamental nature of nuclear weapons will remain unchanged, even with the rise of American nuclear strike capabilities, we might still avoid the re-emergence of the Cold War's worst nightmare scenarios. 🌐

Notes

¹ Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*. It is a Chinese military treatise written during the 6th century BC.

Refers to *The Art of War* translated by Lionel Giles (1910), Project Gutenberg edition with considerable (but dated) text on Sun Tzu.

² Keir A. Lieber and Daryl G. Press, "The End of MAD? The Nuclear Dimension of U.S. Primacy," *International Security*, Vol. 30, No. 4 (Spring 2006), pp. 7–44.

³ The authors' simple conclusion of China's self-constraint over military development as a strategic vulnerability is in interesting contrast to the assumption by the 'China threat' theorists, such restraint is derived from Chinese machinations.

⁴ Nina Tannenwald, "Stigmatizing the Bomb: Origins of the Nuclear Taboo," *International Security*, Vol. 29, No. 4 (Spring 2005), pp. 5-49.

⁵ James E. Dougherty, and Robert L. Pfaltzgraff, "Contending Theories of International Relations: A Comprehensive Survey," 5th ed., New York: Longman, 2001, p. 352.

⁶ Reference to footnote #67 in Lieber/Press article: Kahn, Joseph, "Chinese General Threatens Use of A-Bomb if U.S. Intrudes," *New York Times*, July 15, 2005.

⁷ About the McNamara criterion, see, Robert S. McNamara, *Mutual Deterrence*, Sept. 18, 1967, available at <http://www.cnn.com/SPECIALS/cold.war/episodes/12/documents/mcnamara.deterrence/> and Feiveson Harold A., et al. ed., *The Nuclear Turning Point, A Blueprint for Deep Cuts and De-alerting of Nuclear Weapons*, Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 1999. p. 52.

⁸ For a comprehensive assessment of Mao Zedong's thinking on nuclear strategy see, Cha Lijuan, *Mao Zedong's Nuclear Strategy Doctrine*, master's thesis at the Institute for International Affairs, Tsinghua University, Beijing, 2002.

⁹ Thomas C. Schelling, *Arms and Influence*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1966, pp. 69-91.

Beyond MAD

Ivan Safranchuk

A Dangerous Game

Keir A. Lieber and Daryl G. Press have aroused sharp and widespread criticism throughout Russia over the thesis put forward by “The Rise of U.S. Nuclear Primacy.”¹ The authors conclusion that “...it probably will soon be possible for the United States to destroy the long-range nuclear arsenals of Russia or China with a first strike” has been seen in Russia not only as flawed logically and based on questionable methodology, but even irresponsible with regard to its affect on U.S.-Russian relations. While the Russian commentators were quick to dismiss the substantive aspect of the Press/Lieber nuclear primacy argument, they also rushed into speculation as to why the article was published and opinion about how unwise it was to do so.

A number of Russian technical experts, including Victor Esin, Vladimir Dvorkin and Pavel Podvig, focus on the argument that the American authors underestimated Russia’s current nuclear potential.² They believe that the article

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has exaggerated the degraded state of Russia's arsenal and early warning system. More conservative voices within the Russian political spectrum (such as retired Gen. Leonid Ivashov) also dismiss the emergence of nuclear primacy, reasoning that American nuclear primacy is presently a fiction, although it may emerge in the future, especially if Russia's own national defense remains underfunded.³ Stoking mutual suspicion and justifying greater funding for relevant arms programs are exactly what worries some. Yegor Gaidar plainly defined the article as a provocation and complained how much it could undermine liberal pro-Western forces in Russia.⁴ Sergey Karaganov, a prominent strategist, goes even further by suggesting that the article was actually intended to provoke Russia into wasting more money on ambitious military programs and to promote anti-American isolationist forces who would internally restrain Russia from having an active foreign policy, or to impede Russian-Chinese relations by showing China how weak and vulnerable Russia is.⁵

In short, many commentators in Russia took this article as a sort of test for Russia presented by the U.S. political/defense establishment. Yet unfortunately, while these rebuttals to American nuclear primacy gripped Russia's own experts, the controversy did not elicit a deeper discussion: that is, the question of the present nature of U.S.-Russian relations under the paradigm of mutually assured destruction (MAD) and the unknown future beyond.

Au Revoir to MAD?

Mutually assured destruction is a balance of nuclear forces such that no one can win a nuclear war through first or second strike. Under the conditions of MAD, initiating a nuclear war would entail committing suicide and therefore cannot be a rational decision. Conversely, it is highly rational to demonstrate a technical, political and moral capability to dissuade a potential enemy from launching a nuclear first strike. This means that nuclear strategies within the MAD framework are defensive by definition.

The emergence of MAD from a concept into reality coincided with the era when the United States and the Soviet Union reached a state of nuclear parity. To be sure, such a nuclear balance was never based on a strict calculation, yet the size and quality of each country's arsenal guaranteed that the imbalances that existed in specific systems or "legs" of their nuclear triads did not compromise the basic architecture of absolute nuclear stalemate.

It follows logically that an erosion of this nuclear parity between the

United States and Russia would have consequences for MAD. The disparity in the levels of nuclear capability at which MAD ceases to exist is certainly a complex question. During the height of the Cold War, Russia and the United States had the nuclear forces to annihilate each other five times over. Presently, those capabilities have been reduced to the ability to destroy each other two and four times over, respectively. This relative gap likely has no real impact on MAD. However, a disparity in nuclear forces of the kind where one side's ability to retaliate is destroyed in a first strike may fundamentally change the calculus of MAD.

Overwhelming superiority, on the other hand, does not guarantee zero retaliation. Nuclear superiority may minimize the chances of retaliation. Missile defense may even further diminish the possibility of a second strike. Yet, absolute nuclear primacy – when there will be a high probability of zero retaliation – is impossible with thousands of deployed warheads. Relative nuclear primacy, where one side can conceivably win a nuclear war, also means that retaliation would lead to “acceptable damage.” But this opens up the question of what exactly that level of acceptable damage, or the “pain threshold,” is for the United States. Currently, the prevailing view is that even a single nuclear explosion (presumably of hundreds of kilotons yield) in any of the large American cities represents a level of damage unacceptable to the United States. With such a low pain threshold, reliance on nuclear primacy looks highly dubious. Nuclear primacy then, whether achieved or not, accidental or intentional, may be a great strategic disappointment, as the existing low pain threshold will not provide the opportunity for strategic benefit. A search for nuclear primacy then becomes a waste of taxpayers' money and security apparatus effort.

Despite flaws in the technical aspects of MAD, it will remain, from a political perspective, the only viable concept for the time being. A real, material erosion of MAD, let alone its elimination, will take time and for the foreseeable future MAD will continue to be the strategic framework between the nuclear powers.

Alternatives to MAD?

Mutually assured destruction will remain dominant in the international security system, but only while it is a strategy of necessity. MAD cannot be a strategy of choice. It is impossible to imagine that a rational government

would willingly place its country at the precipice of destruction for the sake of stability and security. In addition, choosing MAD would mean subjecting the country to an extremely high level of vulnerability, which no democratically elected government would be able to sell to its public. Only under imminent threat of an enemy that can destroy you does a resignation to MAD become acceptable or advisable.

During the Cold War, the Soviet Union forced the United States to accept MAD. However, under a transforming security environment, with China restrained in the development of its nuclear arsenal and Russia only investing modestly in nuclear weapons, what is compelling the United States to remain within the structure of MAD? Is it out of habit or convention of security relations left from the Cold War? Or is it a sense of altruism?

In fact, without Russia or China forcing the United States to remain constrained within MAD logic, the domestic pressure or demands for a withdrawal from MAD is likely to grow within the United States. The liberal arms control community may lack sufficiently persuasive arguments to convince the general public of the wisdom of willingly staying within a framework that allows for the possibility of the destruction of its society.

In this sense, the debate about whether there is life beyond MAD is neither misleading nor irrelevant. The obvious alternative to MAD is nuclear primacy. Nuclear primacy was the goal of nuclear strategies before the advent of MAD, and nuclear strategies will likely return to it afterwards. Yet, it must be recognized that if American nuclear primacy was unacceptable to the Soviet Union throughout the early period of nuclear weapons development (from 1945 to the late 1950s), it will surely be unacceptable now as well. Russia will not be humbled by a new U.S. nuclear primacy when it believes that the new situation is real. If MAD dissipates, Russia will certainly take measures to catch up with the United States and restore the balance, though perhaps in a different form: a new MAD, if you will. Historically, this course of events would alternate between positions of nuclear primacy and MAD.

The current vociferous reaction in Russia to Press and Lieber's analysis that the United States may have reached nuclear primacy should be understood in

Even a single nuclear explosion in a large American city represents unacceptable to the United States.

this context. Russian experts' rebuttals do not mean that they are in a state of denial or that there is no concern about potential American nuclear primacy. Rather, they merely do not believe that it has materialized at this point in time.

If indeed MAD is eroding, then there is certainly a concern that a change to the new MAD security environment could be more destabilizing than a continuation of the current MAD structure. Restoring MAD would likely be accompanied by a qualitative and quantitative arms race that would have negative consequences for broader political and geopolitical relations. Yet the temptation to escape the logic of mutually assured destruction may be too powerful to resist.

For the arms control community, this may lead to the unexpected conclusion that for the sake of international peace, security and stability, it would be more advisable and realistic to call on Russia to take steps to underpin and reinforce MAD rather than require the United States to remain within MAD through goodwill. Expecting the U.S. government to remain within MAD based on altruism or by principles other than its national interest, based on the judgment of this author, is untenable in the long run and morally flawed.

The question remains open: are there other alternatives to MAD besides nuclear primacy? They are not apparent, but they may exist and other ways of heading off the trend toward MAD should be thoroughly explored.

Nuclear Strategy without Ideology

Mutual assured destruction seems fundamentally irrelevant in the absence of ideological conflict as it existed during the Cold War. The United States and the Soviet Union had reason to threaten annihilation against each other throughout the Cold War. It was existential war. By nature, the Cold War was waged by zero-sum calculus. Nuclear weapons were first intended to help gain the advantage in a confrontation; however, with the emergence of MAD, the nature of the zero-sum game was dramatically revised: it was very possible, even likely, that both America and Russia would lose in a nuclear conflict. Thus, the strategic paradigm became dominated by a lose-lose option. And thus, "not losing together" became a sort of win-win option, which demanded codification of MAD through treaties.

In other words, MAD turned the Cold War into a complete stalemate. With all the moral flaws intrinsic to it, MAD could only be adopted under

Cold War pressures. However, the end of that era also brought the end of ideological confrontation. There is no other ideological (or non-ideological) conflict between the United States and Russia that can justify a readiness to devastate each other. Absent an ideological *raison d'être* for MAD, exploring possible nuclear relations in a bilateral (U.S.-Russian) or perhaps trilateral (U.S.-Russian-Chinese) format would be helpful to understand the conditions under which these countries would consider the use of nuclear weapons in the current security environment.

However, it seems that no one has yet figured out how to move beyond the rationale of MAD and the Cold War ideological battle underpinning it. After such a long period in which the nuclear powers held nuclear guns to each other's heads, both sides still hesitate to put them down. Paradoxically, this is the most powerful, if not the only, means of interdependence the Americans and Russians have. Unless other forms of co-dependence emerge, in energy or other spheres that can have a less-lethal deterrent characteristic, Russia will remain interested in nuclear deterrence and MAD in its relations with the United States.

Throughout the 1990s, the argument was popular in Russia that the United States would be much tougher on a Russia devoid of nuclear weapons. Consequently, nuclear weapons were taken as the primary vehicle underpinning Russia's "great power" status. Nuclear weapons were also widely perceived as the only available tool to compensate for the outstanding military disparity between America's growing power and Russia's relative decline. Presently, Russia continues to view nuclear weapons as a compensation for that loss of parity. Yet, the nature of its rationale has shifted. With the growth of what can be seen as a deep Russian skepticism of the United States -- Russia is no longer considered a threat, but it is not expected to become a partner with the United States -- Russia is losing its place of strategic importance. Nuclear weapons and a continuation of MAD appear to be the only means to preserve a measure of "strategic attention" towards Russia. Thus, if the viewpoint prevalent in the 1990s was, "The United States would bring harm to us, if not for nuclear weapons;" the formula now is, "The United States would not care about us at all, if not for nuclear weapons." Until

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Russia has other assets of strategic importance, nuclear weapons and MAD will continue to be very important for Russia.

Energy resources may be emerging as Russia's new strategic assets. Although there is a growing confluence of energy and politics, Russia still does not feel powerful or dominant enough in this sector to be sure that energy could act as a substitute for nuclear weapons as "insurance" against strategic loss. Nuclear strategy, at least on the Russian side, looks more and more like a "hedging" strategy. Ideologically, the United States and Russia do not need MAD and could go beyond nuclear deterrence. But presently, there is no viable alternative for nuclear deterrence relations.

MAD: Beyond the Bilateral Structure?

Another fundamental question is whether mutually assured destruction can exist beyond a bilateral U.S.-Russian format. If a trilateral deterrent arrangement emerges between the United States, Russia and China – a scenario that grows increasingly likely as American nuclear posture takes China more and more into account – will the traditional MAD structure continue to exist? Or will it take some other form? What would the U.S. nuclear arsenal look like if it was designed to assure destruction to both Russia and China in one strike?

The problem goes beyond technical issues of whether one party (likely the United States) would have sufficient numbers and capability to carry out a first strike against Russia and China. The real issue would be in terms of the new strategic configuration and its stability. In a bilateral MAD relationship, mistrust was compensated for by a calculation that nuclear war was not in either party's interest. But in a MAD arrangement with three or more actors, party A may theoretically have an interest in war between the other two actors, assuming that war did not involve party A. In a trilateral MAD format, mistrust may be compounded by suspicion that one of the parties has an interest in nuclear war between the other two. Bilateral MAD was inherently stable and acceptable, because mistrust was offset by strategic clarity while a trilateral MAD maintains, even complicates the mistrust between parties without any strategic clarity. MAD is likely to be destabilizing and dysfunctional as a strategy to maintain peace in a triangular relationship.

In a situation of U.S. nuclear superiority, let alone nuclear primacy, Russia and China could cooperate to optimize their position confronting the United States. This would, in essence, be reverting to a derivative form of the tra-

ditional bilateral MAD, but on worse terms for the United States. Naturally, there are many reasons to question the possibility of a Russian-Chinese nuclear alliance. The likelihood of such an alliance at this time seems small, yet when they discover that traditional MAD calculations do not help to stabilize nuclear competition, some form of nuclear triangle may emerge as the only option.

Beyond the bilateral format, MAD looks risky and unstable. If the nuclear triangle continues to emerge, it will probably give birth to a new strategic architecture. This author would suggest that concepts like “minimum deterrence,” which has already been theoretically available for a while but not useful for Russia and the United States as they remain within MAD, should be given more serious attention.

Conclusions

MAD is a strategy of necessity. Without the ideological opposition that defined the Cold War, MAD has become outdated and morally unjustifiable. It cannot be maintained as a policy of choice. Consequently, if Russia does not make efforts to reinforce strategic requisite for MAD, the doctrine will inevitably be challenged. The emergence of a nuclear U.S.-Russian-Chinese triangle will further add to the erosion of MAD, as it may not be as stable and useful as in its bilateral form. Currently, the only currently available option beyond MAD is U.S. nuclear primacy. This will not be acceptable to Russia, which, when it comprehends the emergence of this new nuclear status, will force the United States back into MAD. Understandably, U.S. resistance will only add to political complexities and the overall deterioration of relations, but may not change anything in the end: MAD will re-emerge.

Russia and the United States do not have any reason to remain within MAD, except that they do not know how to leave it. Joint efforts are needed to explore options regarding how to move beyond MAD without regressing toward nuclear primacy. It is likely that the arms control community will be tempted to offer the “tested” remedies of arms control treaties. Certain measures like “de-alerting” nuclear weapons do mitigate the urgency and reduce the risk of MAD. However, arms control regimes, as they emerged during Cold War, codified MAD. At base, the message of the traditional arms control movement is that MAD is acceptable, and can be made more predictable through carefully managed treaties. That was true for the Cold War. However, this overlooks the fact that MAD was the result of necessity. That was a

relatively easy message to sell to the public. Under the current conditions arms control proponents risk making the fundamental error of shifting from defending the means of managing the unavoidable strategic balance of mutually assured destruction toward defending MAD as an inherent principle. Any argument directly for MAD by the arms control community is highly vulnerable to rational and moral criticism. ☹

Notes

¹ Keir Lieber and Daryl Press, “The Rise of U.S. Nuclear Primacy,” *Foreign Affairs*, March/April 2006.

² Victor Esin, *Nezavisimay Gazeta*, March 23, 2006; Vladimir Dvorkin, “The US: Is Nuclear Primacy Real?” *Argumentiy I Factiy*, April 5, 2006; Pavel Podvig, “Open to Question,” *Foreign Affairs*, September/October 2006.

³ Leonid Ivashov, Interview with *Moskovskiy Komsomolets*, March 23, 2006.

⁴ Yegor Gaidar, “Nuclear Punditry is a Dangerous Game,” *Financial Times*, March 29, 2006.

⁵ Seregey Karaganov, “Nuclear Rookies or Provocateurs?” *Rossiyskay Gazeta*, March 31, 2006.

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