



An Exchange of Next Generation US-China Nuclear Experts Key Findings

On June 8, 2011, a group of about 20 graduate students and young professionals met in Honolulu, Hawaii for a daylong session to discuss aspects of the strategic nuclear relationship between the United States and China. The event, which was cosponsored by the CSIS Project on Nuclear Issues (PONI) and the Pacific Forum CSIS Young Leaders program, featured four 90-minute sessions, each opened by presentations of two discussion papers by a US and Chinese participant. In the two days before the exchange, participants observed the *US-China Strategic Dialogue*, also sponsored by Pacific Forum CSIS and the Naval Postgraduate School, which helped frame the discussions.

The views expressed here do not necessarily represent the views of either governments or the conference participants as whole.

Key Substantive Takeaways

- There's no agreement among or between US and Chinese participants on when US Conventional Prompt Global Strike (CPGS) or Chinese anti-access and area denial (A2/AD) capabilities would be used.
 - Chinese participants insisted that China's new ballistic missiles are defensive, while acknowledging that they're designed and deployed with US carriers and regional bases in mind.
 - Chinese participants would not say when these missiles might be used, or whether preemption is a possibility. This suggests that Chinese participants either don't want to reveal their thinking or haven't thought through the strategic application of such capabilities.
- Chinese participants insist that China has no intention of developing and fielding a missile defense system.
 - China does plan to continue testing missile intercept capabilities to learn about the technology, presumably in part because of their interest in hit-to-kill technology for anti-satellite weapons. China is most concerned with technological surprise, where US capability missile defense technology quickly matures and China doesn't have the know-how to catch up.
- There was a consensus that present US missile defense capabilities do not threaten China's deterrent. There was also agreement that, should US technology and deployments advance, China should modernize its nuclear forces to the point where it does not feel threatened by US capabilities.
 - China might consider countermeasures and expanding the number of its deployed missiles. Some US participants argued that such developments would be welcome.
- There was disagreement over China's No First Use (NFU) pledge.
 - Chinese participants insisted that the pledge is serious and didn't understand why the US would not believe it. NFU strongly affects Chinese thinking.
 - There was disagreement on the US side about the credibility of the pledge, but generally US participants were skeptical. In China's position, the US participants couldn't imagine adopting an NFU pledge; they came up with a number of scenarios where nuclear first use by China would be, in their view, rational.
 - Disagreement over the credibility of China's NFU pledge led to misunderstanding. Chinese participants couldn't understand why the US would want to discuss crisis stability, in particular 1st strike stability. Chinese participants seemed to think of a 1st strike as unthinkable.

- This suggests a basic difference in US and Chinese thinking. US participants are more willing to consider low-probability contingencies as worst-case scenarios. Chinese participants seem to think that by raising such scenarios, Americans are saying that they are more likely or desirable.
 - Chinese participants resisted “what if” questions that push the limit of NFU. At one point, a Chinese participant said, “asking those types of questions could threaten NFU”.
- There was disagreement over the term “strategic stability”, but general agreement on the concept, at least as it applies to nuclear forces. Both sides agreed that the US and China need to maintain confidence in their ability to retaliate with nuclear weapons, which requires an effective and survivable second strike force.
 - Disagreement stemmed in part from linguistic misunderstanding. The US and China participate in “strategic” dialogues on various topics, which causes confusion in China. Some Chinese participants preferred a broader definition that focused on the overall quality of the relationship.
 - China connects “strategic stability” with the Cold War and doesn’t want to be equated with the Soviet Union. The comparison implies that the United States seeks a hostile relationship with China like its relationship with the Soviet Union.
 - Perhaps an alternate term, such as “nuclear forces stability,” which is more precise and has less baggage, could be useful.
- Chinese participants insisted that there must be more progress between the United States and Russia in bilateral arms control before China will join a multilateral process. In principle, however, China is not opposed to formal, multilateral arms control.
 - US participants thought that verification would be the most difficult issue because of China’s resistance to transparency. Chinese participants disagreed, noting that China has signed an increasing number of agreements that have verification components. For example, Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) inspections occur frequently in China.
 - Both sides agreed that the process must start with informal agreements that establish norms and build confidence, rather than formal limits.
 - The first multilateral arms control treaty for nuclear forces might be designed around a ban on silo-based MIRVed missiles. Such an agreement would avoid the problem that a reduction treaty faces with different force levels, and establish a verification regime that could be a building block for future agreements.