

TOWARDS STRATEGIC DIALOGUE WITH CHINA

Annotated Bibliography

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Towards Strategic Dialogue with China Center for Global Security Research Livermore, California, February 23-24, 2022

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Key Questions:

- What are the key substantive issues?
- How should the interests and views of US allies inform the US approach?
- What are the prospects for success?
- How can insights from Track 1.5 dialogues increase those prospects?

Panel Topics:

1. What Might China Want to Talk About?
2. The Mutual Vulnerability Question
3. Crisis Management and Nuclear Risk Reduction
4. Stability in an Era of Strategic Competition

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Panel 1: What Might China Want to Talk About?

- What concerns might it wish to register about the Biden administration's national security strategy, defense strategy, NPR, etc.?
- What clarifications might it seek?
- What issues, if any, might it seek to resolve through dialogue?

Bin, Li. "The Revival of Nuclear Competition in an Altered Geopolitical Context: A Chinese Perspective." *Daedalus* 149, no. 2 (2020): 56–68. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/48591312>.

The author argues that China's approach to nuclear deterrence remains premised on ensuring that a small number of nuclear weapons can carry out retaliation after a preemptive attack. Although China's international interests have expanded, China, in the author's assessment, does not seek to use its nuclear forces to expand its international influence. In contrast, the US uses the size of its nuclear arsenal and its extended deterrence commitments as tools of hegemonic influence. In his view, China does not have the ability to attain parity with the United States even if it intended to do so. Instead, any expansion in the numbers of Chinese nuclear forces should be seen as a response to U.S. homeland missile defense capabilities and the presence of voices in the United States arguing for renewed efforts to attain nuclear superiority over China. China is skeptical of U.S. assurances that homeland defenses cannot counter missile threats from China. China is also wary of multidomain influences that can affect nuclear competition to include space technology, hypersonic vehicles, cyber, and artificial intelligence.

Cunningham, Fiona S., and M. Taylor Fravel. "Why China Won't Abandon Its Nuclear Strategy of Assured Retaliation." Policy Brief. Harvard Kennedy School: Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, December, 2015.

<https://www.belfercenter.org/sites/default/files/files/publication/cunningham-fravel-dec15-pb-final.pdf>.

The authors present the expert consensus as it stood in 2015. They argue that China is unlikely to dramatically expand the size of its nuclear arsenal or change its approach to nuclear deterrence, which is premised on assured retaliation. Instead, changes in China's arsenal are likely to reflect concern for the threat that U.S. missile defenses and conventional long-range strike capabilities could pose to the survivability of China's nuclear forces. Even if China's nuclear posture does evolve, China is likely to maintain a policy of assured retaliation and a no-first-use policy. With respect to the latter, the authors argue that China encourages some limited ambiguity about its no first use policy because doing so could encourage deterrence of a first strike on China. The authors also express concern about Chinese optimism about the risk of nuclear escalation with the U.S.

Twomey, Christopher, Michael Glosny, Diana Wueger, and Ryan Jacobs. "U.S.-China Strategic Dialogue, Phase IX Report." Technical Report. U.S. Naval Postgraduate School, March 1, 2018. <https://apps.dtic.mil/sti/citations/AD1048594>.

This paper summarizes the outcomes of the ninth annual session of the U.S.-China Strategic Dialogue held in 2015, an unofficial meeting of Chinese and American government and academic participants. Chinese participants reiterated China's emphasis on maintaining a "lean and effective" nuclear force, but also discussed the importance of improving their force's effectiveness, reliability, and safety. The Chinese delegation also attributed China's nuclear modernization to U.S. ballistic missile defense systems. Participants also raised the notion of mutual vulnerability several times during the conference. Chinese participants contrasted the U.S.-Russian nuclear relationship, which was premised on mutual assured destruction, with a U.S.-China relationship premised on mutual vulnerability as the basis for strategic stability. The delegation from China also voiced their concerns on the U.S.'s extended deterrence to its allies abroad. They also raised concerns that U.S. conventional prompt global strike (CPGS) capabilities could negate Chinese strategic forces. The Chinese delegation wanted to further the conversation on NFU in the future as an official discussion for a potential joint NFU agreement with the U.S.

Yunzhu, Yao. "Taking Stock: The Past, Present, and Future of U.S.-China Nuclear Dialogue." *Taking Stock U.S.-China Track 1.5 Nuclear Dialogue*, edited by Brad Roberts. Livermore, CA: Center for Global Security Research, December, 2020. https://cgsr.llnl.gov/content/assets/docs/CGSR_US-China-Paper.pdf.

The author summarizes the experience of 16 years of U.S.-China nuclear dialogue. These efforts had three main phases: 1) the exploring phase, 2) the thriving phase, and the 3) declining phase. Some of the enduring issues examined in these dialogues have been U.S. extended deterrence commitments, U.S. missile defense systems that have been placed close to China (such as the THAAD deployment to South Korea), potential usage of low-yield nuclear weapons over Taiwan, and ways to denuclearize the Korean peninsula. In terms of areas of mutual understanding, both countries recognize the underpinnings of China's no-first-use (NFU) policy, the U.S. views on NFU, the need to accept a certain degree of mutual vulnerability, shared interests in the strategic arena, the need to expand strategic dialogue on issues beyond nuclear forces, and the growing importance of the nuclear dimensions of the U.S.-Chinese bilateral relationship.

Panel 2: The Mutual Vulnerability Question

- Should the US accept mutual vulnerability as the basis of the strategic military relationship with China?
- How should the interests of its allies inform this decision?

Bin, Li, and James L. Schoff. "A Precarious Triangle: U.S.-China Strategic Stability and Japan." Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, November 7, 2017. <https://carnegieendowment.org/2017/11/07/precarious-triangle-u.s.-china-strategic-stability-and-japan-pub-74628>.

The authors synthesize discussions from a Carnegie-facilitated workshop among American, Chinese, and Japanese security experts. Participants broadly agreed with the notion that the U.S. is not invulnerable to Chinese nuclear retaliation but disagreed on the U.S. response to such threats. In terms of regional conflicts, Japanese participants were particularly concerned that U.S.-Chinese competition in the region may encourage the Chinese to be more aggressive towards Japan. This invited further conversation about mutual vulnerability and whether this is an accurate description of the U.S.-Chinese nuclear balance. Participants discussed the pros and cons of U.S. acceptance of mutual vulnerability. On the one hand, accepting mutual vulnerability could help Beijing remain content with its current deterrent force and refrain from expansion. On the other hand, accepting mutual vulnerability could mistakenly be read in Beijing as a signal of U.S. deference to China, which may lead to more geopolitical conflict in the region. Some Chinese participants questioned whether US acknowledgement of mutual vulnerability would be sufficient for strategic stability absent consensus on other issues. Geopolitical issues, such as North Korea, further complicates the conversation on mutual vulnerability. Some participants also noted that the mutual vulnerability dilemma can exist in other domains. The workshop concluded that future dialogues should continue to address traditional topics while expanding their focus on other areas and domains.

Kroenig, Matthew. *Deterring Chinese Strategic Attack: Grappling with the Implications of China's Strategic Forces Buildup*. Atlantic Council, November 2021. <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/in-depth-research-reports/report/deterring-chinese-strategic-attack-grappling-with-the-implications-of-chinas-strategic-forces-buildup/>.

The author argues the U.S. should view the strategic nuclear balance through the lens of the need to deter a Chinese attack on Taiwan. If China invades Taiwan with little U.S. intervention, the author argues, U.S.'s credibility in the region and U.S. security commitments to regional allies will suffer. The US therefore needs to formalize U.S. superiority in the Sino-U.S. balance of power, deny China's ability to invade Taiwan, reassure allies of extended nuclear deterrence, and prevent Beijing from making miscalculations about the U.S.'s resolve to utilize conventional and if needed, strategic forces to respond to Chinese aggression in the region. This necessitates that the U.S. maintain its quantitative and qualitative (in terms of capability) nuclear and conventional edge over China. While the U.S. is vulnerable to Chinese nuclear weapons, the author argues that the relationship is still highly skewed in favor of the U.S., and the U.S. should maintain this asymmetric vulnerability.

Roberts, Brad. "Rethinking Mutual Vulnerability in an Era of US-China Strategic Competition." Pacific Forum, forthcoming.

This essay provides a reassessment of the basic policy question in light of 2021 revelations about rapid projected growth in Chinese nuclear forces. Roberts argues that to further the interests of its partners and allies, the U.S. needs to accept mutual vulnerability with China, and make clearer its strategic intent. He also provides a set of principles to guide a more competitive response to China's growing nuclear force: 1) do no harm, 2) seek U.S.-China dialogue about their shared strategic military relationship, 3) don't expect meaningful change in China's political and military trajectory, 4) engage allies, 5) have a clear exit strategy from strategic competition, and 6) compete on U.S. terms. While accepting mutual vulnerability may invite increased risk taking by the Chinese military, this problem will likely arise regardless. In response to some Japanese experts' concerns about the resulting "stability-instability paradox," the author argues that China's attainment of assured retaliatory capabilities cannot be stopped or reversed.

Takamizawa, Nobushige. "The Age of Renewed Great Power Competition: A Role for 'Interactive Sincere Powers'." The International Centre for Defence and Security, August 3, 2021.

<https://icds.ee/en/the-age-of-renewed-great-power-competition-a-role-for-interactive-sincere-powers/>.

The author argues that the challenges posed by Chinese and Russian hybrid warfare, disinformation, and influence operations could be addressed by collaboration among "interactive sincere powers," defined as "countries sincerely and without hidden ulterior motives willing to play a positive role and constructively interact with each other" in support of a rules-based international order. Such powers should uphold five principles: 1) implement commitments and deliver results, 2) interact with a demand-driven approach when engaging with developing countries, 3) sustain support even if/when strategic focus shifts to different areas, 4) provide suitable alternatives, and 5) engage with major powers on both bilateral and multilateral platforms. The author further states that when managing China, it is important to understand how Beijing perceives the rule of law, but also the Chinese policies (that are often at odds with the rule of law) utilized to attain their ambitions and goals. Deception and disinformation have been frequent Chinese practice, even challenging global confidence building at times. Therefore, the author argues that China should make their security policies more transparent and cease coercive actions around the world.

Panel 3: Crisis Management and Nuclear Risk Reduction

- What are the potential risks of nuclear confrontation over Taiwan?
- To what extent is there a shared interest in reducing those risks?
- What can reasonably be accomplished through dialogue in the near term?

Beauchamp-Mustafaga, Nathan, Derek Grossman, Kristen Gunness, Michael S. Chase, Marigold Black, and Natalia D. Simmons-Thomas. "Deciphering Chinese Deterrence Signaling in the New Era: An Analytic Framework and Seven Case Studies." Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, May 27, 2021. https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RRA1074-1.html.

The authors identify key patterns of Chinese behavior and doctrinal approach to deterrence signaling by utilizing key case studies and official Chinese publications. The Chinese conception of deterrence, or *weishe* (威慑) can also connote compellence, therefore the term has both coercive and dissuasive elements to its meaning. The authors note the importance the Chinese place on linking deterrence to their specific political and policy objectives. The Chinese military breaks down deterrence into three phases: 1) peacetime, 2) crisis, and 3) wartime. The 2013 *Science of Military Strategy* from the Academy of Military Science noted that for the Taiwan question, it would be important for the Chinese to continue to exercise deterrence during ongoing military operations against Taiwan to avoid US intervention. Furthermore, the Chinese typically take a multidomain approach to deterrence, with a consistent emphasis on psychological warfare via deception to achieve its goals. Official publications such as the 2004 People's Liberation Army Rocket Force *Science of Second Artillery Campaigns* and the 2001 *Science of Military Strategy* highlight the importance of manipulating adversary's perceptions and utilizing psychological warfare to achieve deterrence. The authors comment that to avoid inadvertent military escalation with China, there should be at least minimal level of bilateral communication.

Cunningham, Fiona S., and M. Taylor Fravel. "Dangerous Confidence? Chinese Views on Nuclear Escalation." *International Security* 44, no. 2 (October 1, 2019): 61–109.

https://doi.org/10.1162/isec_a_00359.

This article examines the Chinese view on nuclear escalation by reviewing Chinese publications and interviewing members of the Chinese strategic community. There seems to be a general sense of confidence within the Chinese strategic community about the ability to avoid nuclear use in conventional conflict. This confidence seems to stem from China's long-standing emphasis on separating nuclear and conventional military strategy, the availability of multidomain capabilities (such as cyber), and the organizational biases of different Chinese nuclear communities. Chinese military thought also exhibits a belief that nuclear use cannot be managed once introduced in a conflict. Rather than engaging in conventional conflict that could readily escalate into nuclear warfare, some Chinese writings suggests that China should be willing to cede certain military goals and even terminate a war before it leads to even limited nuclear warfare. Chinese experts also seem to believe that the US would avoid intervening in a conflict that could potentially lead to nuclear confrontation—this is particularly salient on the Taiwan question. These Chinese assessments provide insight on their perceptions of the U.S.'s resolve to provide its allies extended deterrence and security guarantees.

Morgan, Forrest E., Karl P. Mueller, Evan S. Medeiros, Kevin L. Pollpeter, and Roger Cliff. *Dangerous Thresholds: Managing Escalation in the 21st Century*. 1st ed. Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2008. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.7249/mg614af>.

This report outlines different types of escalation and their related implications for escalation management in the 21st century. Regarding Chinese nuclear forces specifically, the authors present observations from key Chinese military documents to examine their

thinking on nuclear escalatory management. Early Chinese writing on this topic seem to acknowledge its technological inferiority when measured against the U.S., and the need to utilize first mover advantage and psychological operations to make up for its deficit. Some writings suggest that even though the Chinese maintain their position of assured retaliation, it also comments on the possibility of launching a preemptive strike by expanding the definition of the enemy's first strike as "military activities conducted by the enemy aimed at breaking up China territorially and violating its sovereignty." Furthermore, Chinese nuclear planners grapple with two challenges when it comes to possibility of escalation management in Taiwan: first, China still relies on large retaliatory nuclear strike as its main deterrence mechanism but this might be insufficient when avoiding coercive influence from the U.S. (especially if the U.S. chooses to engage with low-yield nuclear weapons) and second, determining the appropriate response to potential U.S. conventional weapons usage against Chinese nuclear facilities is challenging since such attack does not technically constitute nuclear first use by official definitions.

Warden, John K. *Limited Nuclear War: The 21st Century Challenge for the United States*. Livermore Papers on Global Security No. 4. Livermore, CA: Center for Global Security Research, Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory, July 2018.
https://cgsr.llnl.gov/content/assets/docs/CGSR_LP4-FINAL.pdf.

The author provides a framework for assessing the risks of nuclear escalation in 21st century regional conflicts. This risk stems principally from the possibility that China, Russia, or North Korea could threaten limited nuclear escalation to deter and forestall conventional military defeat in a conflict with the U.S. The author argues that these actors have a number of strategies available to them for gaining advantage with limited nuclear use. Deterring such escalation will require that the U.S. tailor its approach to the interests, capabilities, and strategies of each potential adversary. Although there is no universal blueprint for deterring limited nuclear use, there are principles that can be adopted to different circumstances. These include presenting adversaries with attractive alternatives to nuclear use, reducing the perceived benefits to limited use, and increasing the costs and risks associated with limited use, including the risk that the US will respond with nuclear escalation of its own.

Zhang, Tuosheng. "The Sino-American Aircraft Collision: Lessons for Crisis Management." Chapter 12 in *Managing Sino-American Crises: Case Studies and Analysis*, ed. Michael D. Swaine and Zhang Tuosheng. Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2006: 391-422.

The author, a retired Chinese diplomat and military officer, provides a historical analysis of the 2001 Hainan Island/EP-3 incident, in which a U.S. Navy plane collided with a Chinese fighter jet and undertook an emergency landing on Hainan Island. The crew and aircraft were then detained by China, precipitating a crisis atmosphere while Washington and Beijing negotiated a solution. The author argues that crisis should be understood in the context of the overall nature of the bilateral relationship, which in early 2001 was in a period of transition because of the U.S. adopting a more competitive stance toward

China. In addition, crisis management was made difficult because of several factors. First, China resented the U.S. publicizing the incident, which made quiet diplomacy more difficult. Second, China sought a resolution to the crisis that acknowledged China's broader concerns about U.S. military surveillance around China, while the U.S. sought more narrowly to repatriate U.S. military personnel and its aircraft. Third, China's response was highly centralized while the U.S. response involved subtle differences in tone and emphasis depending on whether Defense Department or State Department officials were involved. Zhang argues that both sides could learn lessons from the crisis, but he expresses skepticism that technical measures can influence risk reduction as long as the political relationship between the two countries remains unstable.

Panel 4: Stability in an Era of Strategic Competition

- What are the risks of multi-domain competition for strategic advantage? To what extent are perceptions of risk diverging or converging?
- Is the U.S.-China nuclear relationship a competitive one requiring management?
- What can reasonably be accomplished through dialogue in the near term?

Radzinsky, Brian. "Chinese Views of the Changing Nuclear Balance." War on the Rocks, October 22, 2021. <https://warontherocks.com/2021/10/chinese-views-of-the-changing-nuclear-balance/>.

In light of ongoing concerns in the US about China's nuclear expansion and China's potential attainment of nuclear parity, the author reviews Chinese strategic views on the nuclear balance. Although there are divergent views among military strategists, civilian analysts, and public commentators, most of these thinkers do not see numerical parity as an important objective for China's nuclear forces. Some internal Chinese dialogue and seminal publications have emphasized instead technological parity, the ability to credibly manage nuclear escalation, and maintaining a small but streamlined nuclear force. Others emphasize mutual vulnerability and strategic stability. Advocates for a much larger Chinese arsenal also reject the concept of parity, emphasizing instead China's political influence and status. As a result, the U.S. should not view numerical parity as a salient threshold for China. Depending on which communities gain influence in the Chinese nuclear debate, the US should be prepared a wider range of outcomes, from Chinese qualitative parity to outright numerical superiority.

Roberts, Brad. "China's Strategic Future." In *China's Strategic Arsenal: Worldview, Doctrine, and Systems*, edited by James M. Smith and Paul J. Bolt, 241–54. Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2021. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv1htpdvw.13>.

The author offers predictions and critical junctures for China's rise to the world stage as a capable nuclear power and its related implications for the U.S.-China relationship. Although the U.S. has traditionally opted for a cooperative strategic military relationship, this tone has noticeably varied throughout the various U.S. presidential administrations. Furthermore, the Chinese are not the only nuclear players that concern in its broader

strategic policy. Additionally, the trajectory of Chinese strategic military modernization may already be set, and there may be little the U.S. can do now to chain its course. However, much of this space is still riddled with many unknowns, and Chinese remain skeptical of U.S.'s intent to cooperate. To promote Chinese cooperation, the US would have to become more effective at creating a vision of a strategic relationship that would be in the interest of both countries.

Saunders, Phillip. "China's Approach to Multi-Domain Conflict." *Getting the Multi-Domain Challenge Right*, edited by Brad Roberts. Livermore, CA: Center for Global Security Research, December 2021. https://cgsr.llnl.gov/content/assets/docs/CGSR_Getting-the-Multi-Domain-Challenge-Right.pdf.

This chapter provides a comprehensive overview of China's current approach to multi-domain warfare. The Chinese view the information domain to be particularly critical and seeks to achieve comprehensive superiority through cross-domain integration. The PLA's resolve to operationalize the multidomain was evident through their 2016 reorganization and the subsequent birth of the Strategic Support Force, which folds space, cyber, electronic warfare, and psychological warfare into a single organization. Despite China's robust development in this space, however, it still faces challenges in figuring out how what successful multi-domain operations look like and how much is considered enough. Relatedly, there is risk associated with miscalculation which can lead to consequential deterrence failure, and unwanted escalation. Given that neither the US nor China has experience with multi-domain warfare with a peer military adversary, and with the uncertainty how the multidomain will develop for either country, there are high risks for miscalculation.

Takahashi, Sugio. "Strategic Stability and the Impact of China's Modernizing Strategic Strike Forces." In *China's Strategic Arsenal: Worldview, Doctrine, and Systems*, edited by James M. Smith and Paul J. Bolt, 63–92. Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2021. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv1htpdvw.8>.

The author states that China's modernizing nuclear and conventional capabilities will shift the theater's military balance, which can have game changing effects on regional strategic stability. China's invulnerable second-strike capability, more specifically its ongoing development of precision multiple independently targetable reentry vehicle intercontinental ballistic missiles (MIRV ICBMs) could afford them counterforce capability against its adversaries (namely the U.S.), in addition to providing countervalue minimum retaliatory capabilities. Based on current projections, the Chinese will have a counterforce capability within its nuclear arsenal, while it continuously modernizes its conventional force—these growths will eventually neutralize U.S.'s nuclear capability and subsequently its extended deterrence capabilities for its allies and partners in the region. This will only sharpen the stability-instability paradox.



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