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## Chinese Reactions to the Indian and Pakistani Tests

### CHINA'S INTERNAL DEBATE ON NON-PROLIFERATION ISSUES AND POLICY

Arms control is a relatively new subject in China. As one Chinese diplomat explained to this author in Beijing in October 1998, China is just beginning to learn that international-security regimes can both favor and constrain Chinese interests. He said that China needs to improve its arms-control institutions and to deepen its understanding of how international arms-control mechanisms work.

There are four categories of arms-control institutes in China (see Table 2). In descending order of policy relevance, these are the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the People's Liberation Army (PLA), government research institutes, and their civilian counterparts. Among them, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the PLA are the two most important institutional decision makers on international-security issues. The key agency within the ministry is the Department of Arms Control, equivalent to the U.S. Arms Control and Disarmament Agency. The PLA maintains a number of arms-control-related institutes, including:

- the China Institute for International Strategic Studies (CIISS), affiliated with the Second Department of the General Staff Department (GSD)
- the Commission of Science, Technology, and Industry for National Defense (COSTIND), under military and civilian lead-

ership until early 1998 and now an entirely civilian organization. COSTIND also includes several affiliated institutes, such as the Chinese Academy of Engineering Physics and the Institute of Applied Physics and Computational Mathematics (IAPCM), both of which offer strong scientific and technological research and development capabilities

- the National Defense University's (NDU) Institute for Strategic Studies
- the Academy of Military Science (AMS)
- the China Defense Science and Technology Information Center (CDSTIC).

In addition, there are several organizations managed or supported by retired PLA officers in Beijing, such as the Foundation of International Strategic Studies and the China Society for Strategy and Management.

Government research centers constitute the third category of arms-control institutes. Among them, the China Institute of Contemporary International Relations (CICIR) is perhaps the most important. One senior fellow at CICIR said that his institute was the first in Beijing to conduct a comprehensive analysis of India's nuclear tests, after which staff members from other organizations came to CICIR to discuss its findings.<sup>50</sup> The Shanghai Institute for International Studies (SIIS) is another government research arm. The China Institute for International Studies (CIIS) in Beijing is a research institute for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. CIIS staff members include scholars, politicians, and former ambassadors. In late 1998, the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS) proposed to establish a center for arms control that would serve the needs of both government and academic researchers.

Academic research institutes for arms control remain a new and limited phenomenon, but they may develop rapidly in the future due to their rich personnel resources and active international contacts. In 1991, the Program on Arms Control and Regional Security at Fudan University's Center for American Studies in Shanghai became the first nonofficial arms-control institute. Faculty members at Beijing University have also conducted arms control research.

The arms-control community in China includes a small number of influential figures whose expertise and reputations enhance the

**TABLE 2**  
**The Hierarchy of China's Arms Control Community**



**Source:** author's compilation.

stature of the institutions in which they work. Among them are Sha Zukang at the Department of Arms Control of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Qian Shaojun and Lu Min at the old COSTIND, and Hu Side, Song Jiashu, and Chen Xueyin at the Chinese Academy of Engineering Physics.

The development and implementation of Chinese arms-control policy, including such major decisions as signing the NPT and CTBT, appear to be top-down processes, although bottom-up feedback tends to play an increasingly important role. Unlike the United States and Russia, whose presidents generally take the lead in international arms-control and disarmament negotiations, China delegates this responsibility to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Also unlike other countries, China sends diplomatic delegates instead of military advisers to the Geneva Conference on Disarmament. In 1993, a Chinese delegation, headed by a Ministry of Foreign Affairs official and including personnel from the Ministries of Chemical Industry, Public Health, National Defense, plus the GSD, signed the Chemical Weapons Convention. In 1996, China signed the CTBT after the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, joined by COSTIND and other departments, initiated the negotiation.

When the Ministry of Foreign Affairs faces a new mission in international-security negotiations, it functions like a central organ, assigning various tasks to arms-control-related institutes across the country. As some experts point out, however, the MFA traditionally lacks broad and in-depth technical expertise and thus seeks to resolve complicated issues through general political and diplomatic principles. In an interview in Beijing in October 1998, one Chinese diplomat acknowledged that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs focuses more on politics and diplomacy, but predicted that as China puts more efforts into arms control, there will be greater collaboration between the ministry and the PLA.

The PLA is a critical player in China's defense decision making and its role deserves more attention than it currently receives, particularly because it appears that in the future, Chinese nuclear policy will increasingly be defined by the military.

The PLA has both interest in and professional knowledge of arms control and disarmament and, consequently, exercises a substantial influence on the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and on China's decision-making process as a whole. Among all the institutes directly or

indirectly involved in work related to the CTBT, the PLA's influence can be detected in both its resistance to and its endorsement of international-security regimes. In 1996, as the ministry was moving toward an endorsement of the CTBT, the PLA provided technical evidence that it claimed showed that the treaty was not in China's security interests. At the time, COSTIND successfully lobbied the ministry to accommodate some of the PLA's concerns.

The PLA was more reluctant than the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to accept both the NPT and the CTBT. Many military officers were concerned about the possible economic and strategic disadvantages if China joined the test ban. As a PLA senior colonel explained, China's military in 1996 still needed additional tests to improve the capability and safety of its nuclear-weapon stockpile.

In general, the PLA has been suspicious of multilateral security initiatives and resistant to calls for transparency in Chinese military budgets, doctrine, force structure, and relations with other nations. Members of the military-industrial sector, for example, were not happy with the suspension of arrangements to assist Iran with its nuclear energy program.<sup>51</sup> Whereas the Ministry of Foreign Affairs advocates international security regimes, the PLA views the ministry as weak on national security issues.<sup>52</sup>

The PLA's attitudes may have received support from former top military leaders such as Liu Huaqing, Zhang Zhen, and incumbent top officers Zhang Wannian and Chi Haotian. Liu, a former member of the Chinese Communist Party Standing Committee of the Political Bureau and vice chairman of the Central Military Commission (1992–1997), had long urged construction of a modernized and high-tech army. Liu repeatedly pointed out that the world's rapid economic development had resulted in a new form of competition in the military field, marked mainly by the building of quality armies with high technology. He stressed that the national defense industry was, in effect, a high-technology industry that concerned itself with national security and reflected comprehensive national strength.<sup>53</sup>

It would not be correct, however, to suggest that China's arms control decision-making process lacks central management or that the PLA has always opposed arms control negotiations. One military researcher suggested that the PLA did not want to publicize its disputes with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and other civilian sectors. Instead, the PLA has sought consensus and active participation in international-security regimes. One Chinese diplomat echoed

the view that the PLA could not oppose the process of arms control because the final decision came from the political leadership above both the ministry and the military. He said that a central task group coordinates all arms-control activities and submits all suggestions to top leaders for decision.<sup>54</sup>

In 1992, according to one interviewee, COSTIND played an important role in pushing China to sign the NPT. Later, a task team at COSTIND, headed by General Qian Shaojun, joined the second-round negotiations on the CTBT. Finally, in 1996, after negotiations initiated by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and joined by COSTIND and other ministries, China signed the CTBT.

COSTIND enjoyed high prestige in China's defense planning and foreign-policy decision making. Tightly controlled by the Central Military Commission until early 1998, COSTIND perhaps played the most important role in Chinese deliberations on the CTBT at the technical level. Evidence indicates that the PLA still retains this central role. Recent developments seem to suggest that the PLA has won strong support from President Jiang Zemin. Other top leaders endorse the PLA's desire to establish a high-tech military force.

Together with COSTIND, other military institutes have also participated in China's arms-control decision making. The Second Department of the GSD is a key source of strategic analysis on national security and defense intelligence. It produces a daily report of major military events, which is circulated to the Central Military Commission, Political Bureau members, and heads of the PLA general departments.<sup>55</sup> The CISS, directed by the Second Department, conducts research for the Ministries of Foreign Affairs and National Defense and for the GSD. Among other issues, it has undertaken negotiations on the MTCR and border demarcations. In 1992, staff members from the CISS joined the U.S.-China-Britain nuclear export discussions.

The National Defense University and the Academy of Military Science engage in strategic and operational analysis, and report to the Central Military Commission and the GSD. Despite their limited functions, the two institutes have high military status and are headed by officers at the rank of general. In recent years, personnel from both institutes have been assigned to arms-control research and international activities.

As an entire functional system, the Second Department of the GSD, with its CISS, NDU, AMS, and COSTIND institutes, collaborates in

informing the top leadership and providing technical and policy options. The AMS sometimes coordinates and channels the submission of reports from these institutes to the General Office of the Central Military Commission, which then evaluates and summarizes them for the top leaders of the Standing Committee of the Political Bureau.<sup>56</sup> It is clear that both civilian and military officials play important roles in Chinese nuclear policy. While the two often disagree, final decisions always come from the top leadership, which is often a small leading group.

### THE OFFICIAL GOVERNMENT REACTION

After India's first round of nuclear tests on May 11, 1998, China's immediate reaction was silence. Within an hour of the morning announcement by New Delhi that the three nuclear tests had occurred, *Xinhua* reported this news without further comment. On May 12, Zhu Bangzao, spokesman for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, did not reply when asked if China would resume its nuclear tests as a result of the Indian tests. *China Daily*, China's official English newspaper, published a brief story on the blast, and *Renmin Ribao*, the Chinese-language People's Daily, had a small news item on page 6. The newspapers did not offer additional comments of their own, but reported that the United States had condemned the blasts.<sup>57</sup>

There were good reasons for this initial silence. First, China has always claimed that respect for the sovereignty of other countries and a policy of noninterference in their internal affairs are major principles of its international relations—and it has criticized other countries for not adhering to these same principles. China clearly remembers the criticism it received after its 1964 nuclear tests. Second, China, like the United States and other countries, was surprised by the Indian nuclear tests and needed time to prepare an appropriate response. Third, the initial silence may also have indicated a lack of consensus among Chinese political and military leaders, for whom non-proliferation is a relatively new and highly sensitive issue.

Two days after the Indian tests, however, China joined in the criticism expressed by many other countries. Zhu Bangzao stated that, "the Chinese government expresses grave concern over India's

nuclear tests. . . . India's nuclear tests under such circumstances run counter to the international trend and are not in the interest of South Asia's peace and stability."<sup>58</sup> In the wake of India's second round of nuclear tests on May 13, China reacted immediately. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs stated that, "The Chinese government is deeply shocked by this and hereby expresses its strong condemnation. . . . The Indian government, which itself has undermined the international effort in banning nuclear tests so as to obtain the hegemony in South Asia in defiance of the world opinion, has even maliciously accused China of posing a nuclear threat to India. This is utterly groundless. . . . This gratuitous accusation by India against China is solely for the purpose of finding excuses for the development of its nuclear weapons."<sup>59</sup>

Qian Qichen, Chinese vice premier, pointed out that a nuclear arms race is likely to take place in South Asia if India's nuclear testing is not stopped.<sup>60</sup> On June 3, a senior Chinese foreign affairs official said that, "I don't want to frighten anyone, but no one likes being anyone else's target. . . . We don't want to be and are not India's enemy, but at least we have to think twice." He added that China could not rule out the possibility of resuming nuclear tests if the situation in South Asia worsened.<sup>61</sup> Despite the official's opening disclaimer, his remarks did indeed frighten a number of other countries about China's nuclear intentions.

Then, in a 45-minute interview with Jean Miot, chairman of Agence France-Presse, Chinese President Jiang Zemin made the following assertions:

- Although China possesses nuclear weapons, it has made a unilateral pledge to use such weapons only in response to a nuclear attack;
- China favors the complete prohibition of nuclear tests and has no intention of restarting such tests of its own;
- India makes China a potential target of its nuclear weapons and must be blamed for the new tensions in South Asia.<sup>62</sup>

During an early-July 1998 visit to Central Asia, Jiang reiterated that China supports the CTBT and opposes nuclear proliferation in any form. "The current tension in South Asia," he said, "was triggered by India single-handedly."<sup>63</sup> When India proposed to sign a pact promising no first use of nuclear weapons with China, Tang Guoqiang, a foreign-ministry spokesman, said that India should first

abandon its nuclear-weapon programs and sign the CTBT and the NPT immediately and unconditionally.<sup>64</sup> *Xinhua* reported Indian assertions that it would not sign the CTBT under what it calls the dictates of nuclear powers and would not succumb to any external pressure to postpone or cancel its nuclear-weapon or missile programs.<sup>65</sup>

Interestingly, Beijing did not attribute the Indian nuclear tests solely to New Delhi's perception of a threat from China. *Xinhua* noted that the Indian BJP government attempted to use the nuclear tests to divert people's attention from its inability to tackle domestic problems: the bomb had become a handy tool to consolidate the cohesion of the coalition government.<sup>66</sup> A *Xinhua* article made the following analysis: "India has always harbored ambitions of becoming a major power. . . . After 50 years of development, however, India has not extricated itself from its status as a poor country, and average output per capita is far down in world rankings. India has been demanding for a long time to become a permanent member of the UN Security Council, and to achieve an international status commensurate with having the second highest population in the world." Thus, in China's view, India wished to achieve great power status by acquiring nuclear weapons, which was clearly revealed by India's attempt to use its nuclear status to this end during Indian-U.S. talks after the tests.<sup>67</sup>

Moreover, the Chinese government has tried to balance outright condemnation with insistence that the Indian government maintain stable relations with China. After India and Pakistan conducted nuclear tests, Tang Jiaxuan, Chinese minister of foreign affairs, vowed that, "We have no intention of imposing sanctions" on the two countries. "As an integrated stance of Chinese foreign policy, we cannot approve countries' imposing sanctions at any time on any countries."<sup>68</sup>

Beijing urged New Delhi to respect the overall interests of the bilateral relationship and immediately to stop all statements and actions against China.<sup>69</sup> Speaking at a seminar in New Delhi, Zhou Gang, Chinese ambassador to India, called India's claim of a Chinese threat to India's security baseless. "The Chinese side could not but refute some wanton attack and accusation against China by certain personages in India in order to safeguard the friendly relations between our two countries and bring the Sino-Indian relations back onto the track."<sup>70</sup>

Beijing also closely watched the change in Indian leaders' attitudes. Chinese media often quoted Indian leaders whose comments appeared consistent with China's own policy positions. According to *Xinhua*, Indian Prime Minister Vajpayee conceded that there was peace, tranquility, and stability along the Sino-Indian border, and added that his government was eager to resolve the border dispute with China through dialogue.<sup>71</sup> In late July 1998, China Radio International reported that Indian Defense Minister Fernandes stressed the need to normalize Sino-Indian relations and for the two countries to remain friends. The Radio commented that this was his first statement on normalization of relations with China at least since May, when he made many anti-China statements.<sup>72</sup> In early August, *Xinhua* reported that Prime Minister Vajpayee, in a speech to the Lok Sabha, appealed to parliament to resolve border issues with China. He said that his government had never identified China as India's "biggest enemy," according to *Xinhua*.<sup>73</sup>

In general, the Chinese government has attempted a balanced, two-pronged approach to its relationship with India. In late July, during a meeting with an Indian official at the Regional Forum of the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN), Chinese Foreign Minister Tang said that India had flagrantly run counter to the world non-proliferation trend. Tang hoped that India would abandon its nuclear-weapon programs, sign the CTBT, join the NPT, and improve Sino-Indian relations.<sup>74</sup>

### THE PLA REACTION

These policy statements by the Chinese government do not reflect a final determination, but, at best, a tentative response to India's nuclear tests. Inside the government, debate continues. Indeed, the PLA's reaction to the tests has been much harsher than that of the Chinese government. One *Liberation Army Daily* article in May, for example, noted that, "India was too impatient to declare that, when necessary, it would not hesitate to use nuclear weapons" in international conflicts. India's nuclear tests had undermined "the security pattern and political atmosphere" in South Asia and its dream of being a regional hegemon is a "nightmare" for the world. The article warned that India will "eventually pick up a stone to drop it on its own feet."<sup>75</sup>

Another *Liberation Army Daily* article by Liu Yang and Guo Feng conveyed a sense of how PLA analysts view the Indian military. With an armed force of 1.36 million men (plus 700,000 paramilitary troops and a 2.8 million-man reserve), the Indian military ranks fourth in the world. (It is more than double that of the rest of South Asian countries combined.) Recent upgrades of its military equipment include air-force purchases of Russian Su-30 fighters and the navy's acquisition of Russian Kilo-class submarines.

India's military strategy, Liu and Guo argue, is "to seek hegemony in South Asia, contain China, control the Indian Ocean, and strive to become a military power in the contemporary world." They acknowledge that India has taken a defensive posture against China to maintain its military superiority in the Sino-Indian boundary region, but conclude ominously that because of India's development of Agni intermediate-range, nuclear-armed missiles, "China's central and south regions are within its range."<sup>76</sup>

In a similar assessment, four analysts from the China Defense Science and Technology Information Center claimed that India produced 350–475 kilograms of weapons-grade plutonium from 1960 to 1994 and that it possessed 245–370 kilograms by late 1994. Assuming 8 kilograms per nuclear device, the Chinese analysts concluded that the material could have been used for 30–46 nuclear weapons. The analysts also estimated that India would have 358–546 kilograms of weapons-grade plutonium—enough for 44–68 nuclear devices—by the end of 2000, and that India could produce about 8 kilograms per year of weapons-grade uranium, for use in the initial stage of thermonuclear-weapons (that is, hydrogen-bombs) development. India's delivery systems, according to the analysts, include the Prithvi I, II, and III ballistic missiles, which have payloads of 1,000, 500, and 500 kilograms, and striking ranges of 150, 250, and 350 kilometers (95, 155, and 220 miles), respectively. Posing a more direct threat to China are Agni I and II ballistic missiles, each with a 1,000-kilogram payload and striking ranges of 1,500 and 2,500 kilometers (950 and 1,550 miles), respectively. Finally, the analysts noted that India is developing an ICBM with a range of about 8,000 kilometers (5,000 miles).<sup>77</sup>

Senior Colonel Yang Haisheng, former deputy diplomatic military attache to the Chinese Diplomatic Military Attache's office in India, wrote that India has a budget for war with China and that its armed

forces frequently conducted exercises aimed at China in the boundary region. He noted that India had exercised nuclear blackmail on Pakistan and had threatened China with its nuclear capabilities. Yang warned that if the international community turned a blind eye to India's behavior, "the evildoer" will continue to trouble the world.<sup>78</sup>

Chi Haotian, Chinese defense minister, said that the tense situation in South Asia was caused by the regional nuclear-arms race and that the "China threat" was just a rumor. The Chinese government was anxious and worried about the South Asian situation, he asserted, urging the countries involved to restrain themselves and to abandon immediately their nuclear weapon programs.<sup>79</sup>

Xiong Guangkai, deputy chief of the PLA General Staff, said on May 21 that, "New Delhi should pay more attention to feeding its poor than building nuclear weapons." Sources believed that PLA pressure was the reason for the harsher Chinese reaction to India's second round of nuclear tests. The PLA was perhaps worried about India's move to develop sophisticated tactical nuclear weapons.<sup>80</sup>

The initial silence after India's first round of nuclear tests, followed by inconsistent statements from senior diplomatic officials, probably indicates a lack of consensus among Chinese political and military leaders. Whereas the government wants to compromise, the PLA continues to express a more hard-line policy toward India.

### CHINA'S REACTION TO THE PAKISTANI NUCLEAR TESTS

After India conducted five nuclear tests, Gohar Ayub Khan, foreign minister of Pakistan, said that, "It's a matter of when, not if, Pakistan will test."<sup>81</sup> On May 28, 1998, Pakistan announced that it had conducted five underground nuclear tests. Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif said that India's tests had changed the strategic balance and deterrence between the two countries. In a later address to reporters, Sharif said that, "Our security, and the peace and stability of the entire region, was gravely threatened. As any self-respecting nation, we had no choice left for us. Our hand was forced by the present Indian leadership's reckless actions. . . . We could not ignore the magnitude of the threat. . . . Today, the flames of the nuclear fire are all over. . . . I am thankful to God that . . . we have jumped into the flames . . . with courage."<sup>82</sup>

The tests were carried out at the Chagai Hills test site in Western Pakistan. The U.S. Geological Survey in Golden, Colorado, reported that the strongest test had a preliminary magnitude of 4.9 on the Richter scale, compared with the 5.4 measure of India's strongest blast. Sharif suggested that Pakistan might resort to nuclear weapons to prevent a defeat in either a nuclear or a conventional war. A Pakistani government statement announced that Pakistan's "long-range Ghauri missile is already being capped with nuclear warheads to give a befitting reply to any misadventure by the enemy." The missile has a range of 1,500 kilometers (930 miles), which means it can reach most of India's major cities.<sup>83</sup> A week before Pakistan's nuclear tests, L. K. Advani, Indian home minister, warned that India's nuclear tests had "brought about a qualitatively new stage in Indo-Pakistan relations" and that Pakistan should "roll back its anti-India policy, especially with regard to Kashmir."<sup>84</sup> Pakistan responded to India's threat with five nuclear tests of its own, and on May 30, Pakistan exploded one more nuclear device.<sup>85</sup>

During the weeks between the Indian and Pakistani nuclear tests, Islamabad and Beijing held security consultations. Some analysts hoped that China would offer Pakistan a nuclear defense assurance to deter it from going nuclear.<sup>86</sup> On May 18, Shamsad Ahmad, Pakistani foreign secretary, held talks with Chinese foreign ministry officials in Beijing. Radio Pakistan Network said that, "Pakistan wanted to take China, a time-tested friend, into confidence about the measures which need to be taken to safeguard national security."<sup>87</sup> At the same time, China's *Xinhua* quoted Pakistani Prime Minister Sharif as saying Pakistan would "not sit back" in the face of India's new threat.<sup>88</sup> When Ahmad returned home, *Xinhua* reported that, "he is fully satisfied with" the visit. According to *Xinhua*, the two sides exchanged views on the "severe impact on global non-proliferation efforts and the dangers posed" by India's nuclear tests. Ahmad said that, "the Chinese leadership has once again affirmed that the China-Pakistan relationship is an all-weather one which has stood the test of time."<sup>89</sup>

Apparently, however, China did not offer nuclear guarantees to Pakistan. Ahmad only told the public that China would not impose economic sanctions if Pakistan conducted its own nuclear tests.<sup>90</sup> (As mentioned above, China did not impose economic sanctions on India either.)

When Pakistan conducted its first nuclear tests, Zhu Bangzao, Chinese foreign ministry spokesman, said that China expressed its "deep regret" over Pakistan's action. He added that, "The Chinese government is deeply worried and disturbed about the nuclear arms race that has appeared in South Asia. We solemnly appeal to relevant countries in South Asia to exercise their maximum restraint, and immediately renounce their nuclear arms development plans so as to prevent the situation from further worsening and for the sake of peace and stability in South Asia."<sup>91</sup> Explaining China's reaction, a Chinese expert on South Asia said, "We knew there was a great possibility that Pakistan would follow [India's tests] because of the internal pressure its leaders face. But this is a rather difficult situation for China. We have a friendship with Pakistan, but we also have a strong stance against nuclear proliferation."<sup>92</sup>

It was also reported that, at the behest of U.S. President Clinton, Chinese President Jiang wrote to the Pakistani government urging it not to conduct a nuclear test just a few days before the blasts, an apparent sign of China's readiness to end its longstanding tie with Pakistan's nuclear program.<sup>93</sup> But, as Zhu Bangzao stated, "The present situation in South Asia was caused solely by India, while Pakistan's nuclear tests were conducted as reactions to India's 'intimidation.'"<sup>94</sup> There was no sign that the Sino-Pakistani relationship had degraded since Pakistan's nuclear tests. In late August, General Zhang Wannian, vice chairman of the Central Military Commission, received visiting General Jehangir Karamat, chairman of the Pakistani Joint Chiefs of Staff Committee and Chief of the Army Staff. Zhang noted that the two countries were friendly neighbors and that their relations have progressed smoothly over time. The two sides exchanged views on broad issues, and Zhang expressed his hope that frequent high-level visits would bring new life into the development of bilateral cooperation.<sup>95</sup> The meeting highlighted the difference between Sino-Pakistani relations and Sino-Indian relations, with the former featuring high-level strategic consultations altogether missing in the latter.