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## CHINA IN THE WORLD PODCAST

Host: **Paul Haenle**

Guest: **Li Bin**

Episode 19: Chinese Nuclear Security

Cooperation

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**Haenle:** You're listening to the Carnegie–Tsinghua “China in the World” podcast, a series of conversations with Chinese and international experts on China’s foreign policy, international role, and China’s relations with the world, brought to you from the Carnegie–Tsinghua Center located in Beijing. I’m Paul Haenle, the director of the Carnegie–Tsinghua Center, and I’ll be your host.

Today, we are the Carnegie–Tsinghua Center in Innovation Towers, surrounded by construction. Hope this does not interfere too much with the podcast, but we’re pleased to be joined by my Carnegie colleague, Doctor Li Bin, a senior associate in the Nuclear Policy Program and the Asia Program at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. Doctor Li Bin is also a professor of International Relations at Tsinghua University. He is a physicist and an expert on nuclear disarmament and nuclear nonproliferation, and his research focuses on China’s nuclear and arms control policy and U.S.-Chinese nuclear relations. Li Bin, we’re thrilled to have you here with us today to discuss the recently concluded Third Nuclear Security Summit in Brussels as well as U.S.-China nuclear security cooperation. Again, welcome.

**Li:** Thank you, Paul.

**Haenle:** The Third Nuclear Security Summit concluded March 25 at The Hague. This was an initiative, of course, that originated in 2009 from a speech by President Obama in Prague in which he called nuclear terrorism one of the greatest threats to international security. President Obama continued on to host the first Nuclear Security Summit in Washington, D.C. in 2010 to draw attention at the highest levels in the international community to the need to secure nuclear material and prevent nuclear terrorism. The second summit was hosted in Seoul in 2012, and this year’s summit was attended by close to sixty world leaders. Li Bin, can you briefly explain for our listeners the main goals and key objectives of this year’s summit, and what issues were discussed?

**Li:** The main goal of this Nuclear Security Summit is still the same as the previous two summits. The goal is to protect, better protect, fissile materials, radioactive materials, and nuclear facilities from terrorist attacks. At this summit, world leaders discussed the action plans, the implementations of these action plans, and the collaboration in new ideas on how to promote nuclear security.

**Haenle:** Can you give us a sense, looking at China for a second, give us a sense in your view what contributions China has made to international nuclear security and the prevention of nuclear terrorism?

**Li:** China has made several very important contributions. The first contribution is very important political support to the common goal of all of our countries on nuclear security. If you look at the first and second Nuclear Security Summit, U.S.-China relations were not as good as this time around, but top Chinese leaders still attended the First and Second Nuclear Security Summit. China understands that this is a common goal. Although different countries may have some problems in their bilateral relations, we should not, you know, sacrifice the common goal on nuclear security because we have some other problems. So, China always takes the very firm support to the common goal. The second important contribution is that China proposed some important ideas on how to strengthen the Nuclear Security Summit. For example, in the Nuclear Security Summit in Seoul, China, together with South Korea and Japan, proposed that we should pay more attention to the security of radioactive material in addition to that of fissile materials.

The original idea of the Nuclear Security Summit was more on the security of fissile materials, but the east Asian countries also worry about the security of radioactive materials. So, China, South Korea, Japan suggest that we should pay equal attention to these materials, and the suggestion was well-taken by the Second Nuclear Security Summit. You know, China also shares with other countries its own experience on nuclear security, and China is working on a training center, together with its neighbors and with the United States. The training center will be open to the whole world. We will take Chinese from China and other countries as well.

**Haenle:** Li Bin, during the summit this time, President Xi Jinping presented the first articulation of China's nuclear security concept. Can you give us a sense of the main messages of this nuclear security concept, and are there major differences between China's concept—China's nuclear security concept—and the international community's understanding of nuclear security?

**Li:** I believe that China shares the common goal with other countries on nuclear security. China also shares most of the approach—you know, China agrees with other countries on most of the approaches on nuclear security. But this time President Xi Jinping proposed some new concepts that may be very unique. When I say unique, I mean it's based on Chinese philosophy because in nuclear security there are some competing efforts, competing goals, competing regiments. How do we deal with these competing efforts and goals? You know, people may have different ideas. For example, when we worry about nuclear security, an easy way is to roll back the gathering of more nuclear materials, more nuclear industry. Then, we do not have to worry about nuclear security. That's one way to think about that. You know, when we think about this, it means that nuclear security and the development of nuclear energy are two separate and opposite goals. But, maybe we should not say that they are opposite goals. Maybe, they are competing goals. According to Chinese philosophy, when you see competing goals, you should manage the balance of the two. In Xi Jinping's speech, he raised some ideas on how to manage such competing goals like development and security, responsibility and right, domestic effort and international cooperation, temporary approach and long-term approach. According to his speech, we should manage these competing arrangements and goals. I don't think this is easy for other countries to take this suggestion for two reasons. One is that this is based on Chinese philosophy. Secondly, I think we, the Chinese, need to make more effort to transfer these ideas, philosophies, into operational arrangements. Only in that way could other countries and experts benefit from such ideas. You know, so far it's still a little bit too abstract for many Westerners. How can we manage such competing goals? We need to operationalize these concepts...

**Haenle:** ... the nuclear security concept. There's also, at the same time, a lot of thinking that says that China is moving to a more active foreign policy. Can we also see this newly articulated concept of China's nuclear security concept as an indication that China will play a more active role in international nuclear security?

**Li:** Yes, I think that China's foreign policy has become more active in general, and on this issue we can see that China wants to make more contributions, especially, you know, more unique contributions. China joined a lot in the discussions in the past, but now China wants to make some unique contributions: contributions that other countries may not do but China could do. So we can see that, but for communication reasons we need to better explain these ideas. Otherwise, as I just said, it's a little bit too abstract.

**Haenle:** Now, one of the big pieces of news that came out of the Nuclear Security Summit, of course, was that Japan announced it would hand over 700 pounds of weapons-grade plutonium and enriched uranium to the United States. Many called this a major victory for President Obama's efforts to secure nuclear materials around the world. Some have cited Japan's large nuclear stockpile as evidence of a double-standard about the ways in which nations are treated and trusted when it comes to nuclear capabilities. China has publicly denounced Japan's supply, warning about the risk that the Japanese government could decide one day to seek its own weapons. How significant is this announcement that Japan made at the Nuclear Security Summit in your opinion, and can this help reassure China?

**Li:** There are two issues here. One is nuclear nonproliferation. The other is nuclear security. Let me explain the perspective of nuclear nonproliferation first. If Japan keeps large amount of fissile material, used for weapons, that poses a threat of nuclear proliferation. Japan could use this as nuclear latency and use this as potential. Whenever Japan decides to develop nuclear weapons, it would have the technologies, materials, and some competence to do that. So, this is a concern of nuclear proliferation. I believe that China has such concerns on Japan, and I believe that it's useful and important for China to raise this concern and to encourage Japan to return plutonium, especially weapons-grade plutonium, back to the United States. So that is the perspective of nuclear nonproliferation.

The other perspective, the other way to look at this issue is nuclear security because, you know, if Japan keeps large amounts of weapon-usable, fissile material, that would pose some risks if terrorist groups could gain access to that. If terrorist groups could have access to this fissile material, then it would be very dangerous, very bad for the security of Japan and its neighbors. So, for that reason, it's not a zero-sum game. You know, if Japan returns this to the United States, as they have agreed to do so, that is very good for the security of the Japanese society. The Japanese people would not have to worry about that a terrorist group would attack fissile materials and would produce nuclear weapons by using these fissile materials. For that reason, I would say, this is a reassurance to the Chinese society, the Japanese society, the Korean society, and for the whole world as well.

**Haenle:** Li Bin, as you know, the Nuclear Security Summit relies heavily on cooperation between the United States and Russia, and this year the Ukraine crisis overshadowed much of the Summit and has, in many views, derailed the hopes of nuclear disarmament advocates, who have been pushing for the United States to remove about 200 B-61 Gravity Bombs from European soil. How much, in your view, do you think the Nuclear Disarmament and Security Cooperation Initiatives were and will be affected by the current Ukraine crisis and the deteriorating tensions between the United States and Russia?

**Li:** Again, here there are three relevant issues. One is nuclear security, the other is nuclear proliferation, and the third is nuclear disarmament. Right now it is very difficult to promote nuclear disarmament between the United States and Russia, but the reason is not because of the Ukraine crisis. There are two reasons here. One is that Russia now has a relatively stable size of its nuclear arsenal. The Russians do not have to worry that they're nuclear arsenal would shrink due to aging. So, the Russian have lost interest in further nuclear reduction together with the United States. [That's] the first reason. The second reason is missile defense. The Russians complain that

the United States is not serious in its commitment to restraining its missile defense development. So, that makes the Russians reluctant to further nuclear reductions. So, the issue of nuclear disarmament is not so much relevant to this crisis, but, you know, it's a difficulty but not so much relevant. For nuclear nonproliferation, the most important thing right now is Iran. Russia may become less active on the negotiations. We do not know yet; we will see. If that happens, that will be very bad for the negotiations because we have seen some positive evidence that the negotiations would move forward. If Russia becomes less active, it may not be good for a positive result. So we hope that Russia will still be active in these negotiations. On nuclear security, the United States and Russia have cooperation in multilateral forums, like the Nuclear Security Summit. They also have bilateral cooperation. I don't think the Ukraine crisis would hurt U.S.-Russian cooperation in multilateral arrangements; that part will still go forward without any problem. We can see that Russia still sent high level officials to this Nuclear Security Summit; they still support most arrangements of the Nuclear Security Summit. But the bilateral cooperation may be affected by the crisis because, since the end of the Cold War, the United States and Russia have been working together to help Russia on the security of Russian fissile materials—for example, to dump the highly-enriched uranium produced in Russia and to convert that into low-enriched uranium for nuclear energy. You know, we call that a nuclear threat initiative, a nuclear threat reduction programs. I hope [those programs] will not be affected, but there's a risk that such bilateral cooperation may be affected by such crisis. I believe that we need to do more work to persuade the two government to continue their bilateral cooperation on nuclear security.

**Haenle:** Li Bin, [for] my last question I want to talk about U.S.-China cooperation. You have mentioned previously the Center of Excellence in Nuclear Security that the United States and China have jointly funded, and in the past several years there seems to have been growing cooperation between the United States and China on nuclear security issues. However, as you know, there remains a certain level of mistrust between the United States and China. I would like to know from your perspective how you see the current states of U.S.-China nuclear security cooperation, and do you think our two countries can improve the levels of cooperation on nuclear security going forward?

**Li:** The two countries have some problems on nuclear cooperation, on nuclear nonproliferation, nuclear disarmament—but the two countries have very good cooperation on nuclear security. So, in general, the cooperation between the two countries on nuclear security is very good, but still, you know, there are some problems. I've found a problem when I talked with my students and colleagues. We've found a problem in the cooperation, but this is not a problem between the United States and China, it's a problem among all countries. You know, if you look at the Nuclear Security Summit this time and the two previous ones, you will see that besides the Nuclear Security Summit, there was some parallel meetings. All of the participants, or most of the participants, are nuclear scientists in arms control, and WMD controllers or weapons of mass destruction controllers. You cannot see many experts on law enforcement, but we need both nuclear scientists, WMD controllers but we also need experts on law enforcement. But we cannot see them. We realize that nuclear scientists and WMD controllers have a tradition of dialogue, so it's easy for them to get together. They know each other; they have very good channels to talk. But for experts on law enforcement, they work on individual countries. They do not talk to each other, but we need them. We need them to make their contribution to nuclear security. We need them to share data on how to stop nuclear terrorism. But unfortunately, the last three Nuclear Security

Summits and some other international cooperation have not yet included much effort on this and maybe the next Nuclear Security Summit in Washington should consider this. We should encourage more experts on law enforcement to join the discussions, to join the international dialogue.

**Haenle:** Well, it sounds like a worthy initiative, Li Bin, and I look forward to seeing you push that good idea from your office in the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace in Washington, D.C., and from your platform here at Tsinghua University. It's been a pleasure to talk to you today.

**Li:** Thank you.

**Haenle:** Thank you very much for joining us. That's it for this edition of Carnegie–Tsinghua “China in the World” podcast. I encourage you to explore our website at [www.carnegietsinghua.org](http://www.carnegietsinghua.org) and see the work of all our scholars at the Carnegie–Tsinghua Center. Thanks for listening, and be sure to tune in next time.