



Engaging China on Arms Control

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Fiona Cunningham:

Well, good morning, good afternoon, and good evening. My name is Fiona Cunningham, and I am a Stanton Nuclear Security Fellow at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. It's my honor and it's my pleasure to welcome you to this panel discussion on Engaging China on Nuclear Arms Control. I'd also like to thank the Japanese Embassy in Washington, D.C. for supporting this event. And this panel could not be more timely because nuclear weapons are becoming an increasingly important aspect of U.S.-China relations.

And this is no longer, or not just a problem, for Washington and Beijing. It is an increasingly serious problem for other countries in the Indo-Pacific region who'd be on the front lines of any U.S.-China confrontation, for Europe, given the interactions with the NATO-Russia nuclear relationship, and the U.S.-China nuclear relationship, and for the rest of the globe, that will be affected by increasing U.S.-China strategic competition.

And the risks of both nuclear weapons used in a crisis or a conflict and an arms buildup between the United States and China are not necessarily new, but they are being accentuated by a number of different factors. Most obviously, U.S.-China relations have taken a competitive turn in recent years that have led both countries to see each other's nuclear weapons as more threatening.

U.S.-Russia arms control has also unraveled in recent years, which affects Beijing's assessments of both the United States as non-controlled partner and its assessments of the kind of U.S. arsenal it's going to need to deter the future. Of course, China's nuclear modernization is also raising questions about the future trajectory of its nuclear posture.

And China is fielding a larger arsenal and new types of nuclear capabilities that may be consistent with its no first use policy, but give its leaders more flexibility in how they might use nuclear weapons in the future. And finally, these two states cannot focus

narrowly on nuclear weapons only in their assessments of the risk of an arms buildup, or the use of nuclear weapons in a future conflict scenario.

Non-nuclear capabilities, whether counter space weapons, missile defense, offensive cyber capabilities and conventional missiles are changing the nuclear landscape in ways these two countries cannot ignore. In addition to these challenges, there's also no clear model for U.S.-China arms control because of asymmetries in the bilateral relationship.

Perhaps most obviously, the Chinese nuclear arsenal is much smaller than the U.S. arsenal, but the two countries also have different nuclear strategies and China doesn't extend nuclear deterrence to allies like the United States does. So, to overcome this suite of challenges, we urgently need creative, politically feasible, and mutually beneficial arms control proposals to move forward on the U.S.-China nuclear relationship. And indeed, that is why we are here today.

This event is the second in a series on the future of arms control that the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace has held. The first of which took place in December and examined engagement with Russia. And I'd encourage all of you to read the interim progress report on Revamping our Nuclear Arms Control. It includes Two Near-Term Proposals that touch on U.S.-China on nuclear relations and the authors, my colleagues at the Carnegie Endowment, James Acton, Thomas McDonald and Pranay Vaddi would warmly welcome your feedback on these proposals.

So, I will now quickly introduce our panelists in the order that they'll be speaking and each speaker will then take five minutes to offer some opening remarks before we have a discussion and turn to questions from the audience.

So James Acton holds the Jessica T. Matthews Chair and is co-director of the Nuclear Policy Program at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. He is a physicist by training and his current research focuses on the escalation risks of advanced conventional weapons, and the future of arms control. And his work will be familiar to many of you who are joining us today.

Tong Zhao is a senior fellow in the Nuclear Policy Program at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace based in Beijing at the Carnegie-Tsinghua Center for Global Policy. Thank you, Tong, for joining us at this late hour in the evening in Beijing. In addition to many recent publications on how China could be engaged in arms control, Tong has also published monographs on China's ballistic missile submarine capability and on Chinese views of U.S. missile defense.

Nicola Leveringhaus is assistant professor in War Studies at King's College London where she specializes in the International Relations of East Asia. Her current research falls under three areas; early Chinese nuclear weapons history, contemporary China-Indian nuclear relations, and conceptions of responsibility across regional and global forms of nuclear order. And I'd commend to all of you, her book on China and our global nuclear order.

And finally, but by no means least we have Nobumasa Akiyama who is a professor at the Graduate School of Law and the School of International and Public Policy at Hitotsubashi University in Japan. He is also joining us at a very late hour. So thank you, professor. Professor Akiyama's publications span the use of non-proliferation, Japan's nuclear security and nuclear energy. So without further ado, I will turn it over to James Acton to start the conversation.

James Acton:

Thanks very much Fiona. And it's not just my co-panelists who are here doing this very late at night, it's Fiona too, so many thanks to you for doing this Fiona. Let me give a shout out firstly, to Pranay Vaddi and TD McDonald who are coauthors on the piece that I'm going to be presenting today, which as Fiona mentioned is part of our thinking about the future of arms control both U.S.-Russia and how to capitalize progress with China.

The paper that Fiona mentioned, which you can download, is genuinely intended to be a working paper. We invite feedback on this proposal and other proposals in order to refine these proposals before republishing them at the end of this year.

The specific proposal I'm going to talk about today focuses on how to manage the U.S.-China nuclear relationship, which was something that the Trump administration emphasized. And the Trump administration expressed concern about the possibility of a large-scale Chinese buildup in nuclear weapons and proposed trilateral limitations with the U.S., Russia and China as a way to manage that concern.

Interestingly, if you look at what the U.S. intelligence community has said about China's nuclear arsenal, and even more importantly, China's fissile material stockpiles- that is the highly enriched uranium and the separated plutonium that are the basic ingredients for nuclear weapons- the Defense Intelligence Agency suggests that China, assesses rather, that China only has enough fissile material to build a total stockpile of several hundred nuclear weapons. Nuclear warheads, I should be more precise there. Whereas the U.S. stockpile is roundabout 4,000 nuclear warheads.

More than that, it appears that China is not currently producing more fissile material for nuclear weapons. So if the U.S. concern is about so-called Chinese sprint to parity or China rapidly trying to build up its arsenal, you don't necessarily have to deal with this problem directly by limiting Chinese warheads or weapons. You can deal with this problem on the fissile material end.

So specifically we make two proposals here. Firstly, that the U.S. and China could agree to a bilateral cutoff in fissile material production that each one of them will commit not to produce any fissile material and that they further commit to talks over targeted verification measures. That is specifically that if either of them has any concerns about the other's compliance, they could try to negotiate targeted measures to address those specific concerns, as opposed to some broader overarching verification regime.

In the paper we discussed at considerable length, what those verification measures could look like. I'm not going to go into verification detail today. And then having declared this bilateral fissile material cutoff, we suggest that the U.S. and China could then exchange data about their fissile material stockpiles, specifically how much fissile material in various categories they currently have.

Now, let's acknowledge right from the outset that as it's currently phrased, this proposal is pretty good from a U.S. perspective. The U.S. has already announced publicly that it's not going to cut off... sorry- that it has cut off fissile material production, and has released data on its stockpile of fissile material publicly.

China by contrast, while it's believed to have ceased production of fissile material has not formally announced a cutoff in production, presumably because it wants to retain the option to produce more fissile material. Indeed, there's some evidence, and I don't want to overstate this, but some evidence of building one of its plutonium production facilities that could be interpreted as making the option more real of producing more plutonium.

So the question is obviously like what's in this proposal for China? Well, the first thing to say is, I think this proposal is hopefully more acceptable to China than the Trump administration's proposal of formal negotiations and limits on nuclear warheads and limits on nuclear weapons. Such limits would inevitably mean China would have to start declaring exact weapon numbers, locations for inspections, that would exacerbate Chinese concerns about the survivability of its nuclear forces.

This cut off proposal here would give a general idea of roughly how many nuclear weapons China might have, but would not require nearly so much intrusive data exchange or verification. But secondly, there's going to have to be a quid pro quo here,

and this is something that Trump administration never wanted to address. Each view of a quid pro quo was that China would get international kudos by having a seat in the top table, which if I were Chinese wouldn't be particularly attractive to me.

So let me acknowledge that there's going to have to be a quid pro quo here. The U.S. is going to have to give something big up for China in return for this. And in writing this paper, like one of the things we wanted to do was not guess what China wanted, but instead to try to start a conversation with Chinese interlocutors and experts and officials, and say, what would be the price here?

We have proposed what we think is a sensible way of managing concerns of a Chinese buildup. We invite you to have internal discussions and to tell us what you would want in return. Maybe we can reach a deal. Maybe we can't, but we don't want to start guessing at what that would be. And with that, let me thank you for your time and attention, and hand it back to Fiona.

Fiona Cunningham:

Fabulous. Thank you, James. I'll just remind everybody who's listening that if you would like to submit a question for the event, then please use the YouTube chat or tweet us at @carnegiepp, all lowercase with no spaces, and I'll turn it over to Tong for his remarks.

Tong Zhao:

Well, Thank you so much, Fiona. I have this belief that arms control can be made to mutually beneficial between U.S. and China, which means China can better defend its own interests through arms control engagement with U.S. and maybe other countries, but due to the capability asymmetry between U.S. and China in terms of their nuclear programs, we have to come up with some arms control measures, and also to make sure that any arms control proposal would be balanced, meaning that both China and United States would benefit relatively equally from such proposals.

And in this light, I think one way to do so is to recognize that both U.S. and China have their different advantages in their strategic military capabilities. The U.S. is very strong in terms of strategic nuclear weapons, but weak in terms of land-based medium range missiles, but China is very strong in a latter, but very, relatively weak in terms of the strategic nuclear weapons.

So one option is to combine those two areas and to set a central limit for the weapons under either the New START Treaty or the INF Treaty. The weapons that are regulated under New START include ICBMs, SLBMs and heavy bombers, and the weapons under INF Treaty are about land-based medium range and intermedium range missiles, which means missiles that have ranges between 500 and 5,500 kilometers.

But if we combine these two types of weapons together, we can have a new arms control framework that basically covers all land-based missiles with a range longer than 500 kilometers plus SLBMs, submarine launched ballistic missiles and heavy bombers. There are several benefits to look at these new arms control framework. One, if we only look at the launchers of these weapons systems, it happens that U.S. and Chinese arsenals tend to have similar numbers of such launchers.

According to my last count, both U.S. and China have about 600 of such launchers. So this would make U.S. and China equal partners in a future arms control agreement, which I think helps address the asymmetry problem. And also avoids making China a small partner to a major military power.

A second benefit is that both countries would have flexibility to decide how to mix their specific capabilities. China can continue prioritizing the development of theater range missiles for defending its perceived territorial integrity, and it can continue maintaining its large strategic forces in order to deter Russia.

A third benefit is that we can also include Russia in these agreements and making it a trilateral framework. The benefit of doing so is that in many cases Russia shares similar interests and concerns with China. And as a new comer, China may feel intimidated for attending a formal arms control negotiation, but with Russia on its side, which also has a richer experience in arms control negotiation with the United States, that may help increase Chinese confidence in participating.

A fourth benefit is that by not looking at missiles for warheads, this arms control framework easier to verify if we only look at the launchers, it is easier to verify than looking at missiles or warheads. And also this agreement wouldn't really distinguish nuclear warheads or conventional warheads. Again, this would make it relatively easy to implement and verify if there's a need to verify this grievance.

A last benefit is that it offers some flexibility in terms of how far the parties want to go in regulating such weapons. If there is a little confidence at the beginning, they can basically start with setting an upper limit of their weapons. In other words, they can choose simply to cap their capabilities, but over time, if they develop greater confidence, they can move towards freezing their capabilities by setting a lower central limit of these weapons.

And if things go well, they can gradually move towards a more radical option, which is to set an even lower threshold and to make these agreements arms reduction agreements.

So that flexibility I think is also useful and offers more potential for more radical steps down the road.

And I think it is important to note that this is not meant as a perfect arms control option, but just something for people to start a joint examination, discussion, and debate at a track two, or track 1.5 levels. And participants in such discussions can certainly build out these framework and jointly identify maybe even better options to conduct arms control.

And I think this process of joint examination and discussion and debate on the arms control model itself can be a useful confidence-building measure because it can help participants from different countries developing a more nuanced views about each other's concerns and may help identify areas for potential cooperation down the road. So I will stop here. Thank you.

Fiona Cunningham:

Thank you very much, Tong. So, with those two proposals now out on the table, we'll turn it over to Nicola Leveringhaus to continue the discussion.

Nicola Leveringhaus:

Thanks very much, Fiona. Thanks Carnegie for the opportunity. I really enjoyed the report. I think it really moves the conversation forward on this important topic. And I really liked the focus on fissile material that the proposal around fissile material cut off that James began this discussion with.

I think I'll center in my comments briefly around this concept of a mutually beneficial package, the term that appears a lot in the report, and also potential motivations for China behind some of these proposals. So in the report itself, it talks about a mutually beneficial package and then the centers that tends to follow is Beijing should start considering what it would ask of Washington, right?

And James, you were very clear that the report wasn't about trying to second guess Beijing, but I wonder if actually it is problematic, right? To put the ball in China's court, as Tong rightly suggests to us, China is a new comer to the arms control. It's also a skeptic to arms control. So that's a double problem.

Whereas of course the United States is neither a newcomer and fortunately under the current Biden administration is hopefully an enthusiast and supporter rebuilding arms control. So I wonder if we should also not simply ask the question of what China wants, but also what would the United States stomach, what is the spectrum of palatability for

the United States, right? What would they be willing to offer, what would they be willing to accept and to start to sort of populate that question a little bit more in the report.

So thinking about it in terms of the proposal, fissile material cut off proposal, it seems to me that for Beijing, its most pressing concerns are largely going to be regional, which means that the United States, if it's going to offer anything in terms of assurances, it might have to actually go beyond its borders.

In other words, it has to start thinking allies. It has to start thinking about how do we assure the Chinese around their concerns for instance about Japan stockpile of plutonium. I don't want to get onto Nobu's toes in the next few minutes, but that's one area. And of course, that opens the door to other things like for instance non-NPT members and India's own stockpile.

Let me now, just in the remaining minutes also talk a little bit more about the motivations that are set out and some of the assumptions underlying motivations that are set out for some of these proposals. I think some of the motivations are persuasive, in particular, the fact that China would have insight into, or new insight into the U.S. stockpile, but some of them are perhaps not so persuasive in part because China, today's not the China of 10, 20 years ago, right?

And there's actually been quite a lot of change in foreign and security policy. You could argue that China is today in a position of relative strength compared to the past. It's arguably the strongest nuclear power its ever been since it became a nuclear weapon state in 1964. Domestically nuclear weapons play perhaps a renewed, but it's certainly a new and important role. There's this new political value attached to these weapons and in the Xi Jinping era.

And I think more importantly for this panel, I think the appeals to China that have typically been made for joining this table and signing up to these proposals usually, and they tend to revolve around fear of nuclear war, the cost of not talking for instance, the risk of an arms race and what that would mean for defense spending and the risks and the damage that it could do potentially to reputation.

I'm not sure that these sort of drivers or appeals work so well in the current context of China today in part, because if we take the threat of nuclear war, for instance, I'm not saying that China doesn't dismiss and I think that China has consistently historically and still to today thinks nuclear war is a terrible thing, but it doesn't have a direct experience of a close call.

Let's put it like that. Like for instance propelled or drove initial arms control between the United States and Soviet Union. Remember that when the Cuban missile took place, Cuban missile crisis took place, it was the Sino-Indian Border War that was going on. So China was preoccupied elsewhere.

And when we think about the economic health or economic damage, well maybe we should turn it around and think about what would be the economic gains, what would be the economic benefits for China? On issues around imaging and responsibility, I really think this is a non-starter for the way that we see China today. I don't think that has much traction.

I think what has more traction is issues around instability, political instability. Think about post Fukushima, how that played out in China, domestic panic around that. So issues around nuclear security and safety, I think have far more traction.

And lastly, I'd very quickly, I think an additional challenge that hasn't really been addressed so far is this issue of insignificance, right? So, in a conversation that Mao Zedong had with Henry Kissinger in 1973, he described China's nuclear position when Kissinger was talking about Sino and talking about Soviet-U.S. arms control, Mao said, "We're just a fly, we're insignificant." Right?

And so, the question is, how do you overcome that, right? And one way of overcoming that is thinking about how China is still very much aware and very much attentive to non-nuclear concerns among the non-nuclear weapon... nuclear concerns on non-nuclear weapon states and I'll leave it there.

Fiona Cunningham:

Wonderful. Thank you very much, Nicola. And we'll now turn to Nobumasa Akiyama.

Nobumasa Akiyama:

Thank you very much. I really enjoyed in the three presentations before me, and I don't know if there's anything left for me to speak, but my role is to provide some comments and questions from Japanese perspective on James' proposal and Tong's idea. So, let me first address the, James and others' excellent paper on how to revamp nuclear arms control and how to reduce the risk of arms race escalation.

I think after reading the report, I found that the five proposals are very concrete and they sound very practical. And given that the current strategic environment surrounding the three major powers is quite rough and it's not well suited to advancing the negotiation for the follow-on treaty of the New START. And it is, I think, a good idea to

propose that the U.S., Russia and China should seek harvesting so-called, somewhat low-hanging fruits so that they could reestablish habit of cooperation and realize or re-realize the benefit of arms control for their national security.

So, in particular, with a great divergence of views on arms control and the strategic stability, the United States and China need to build on small successes to improve mutual trust, which is a basis for the dialogue for most substantive arms control and confidence building measures, which actually Tong had suggested. And in this respect, I think the cut off fissile material can be a good start point.

And having said so, I have a couple of questions on the mutual cutoff of the fissile materials. First, I wonder how to ensure that Chinese reprocessing plants and the reactors are used exclusive for civilian purposes, or in other words, is civilian military suppression possible for Chinese fissile material production? Ans how can we ensure it?

And possibly, I'm wondering if China has submitted the report to the IAEA based on INFCIRC/549, that is in a Guidelines for the Management of Plutonium. And if that will be kind of one way to ensure the separation of civilian and military fissile material production particularly in plutonium, then I think that could be more even a very first start of this cut off process.

And second, for the gaining of confidence on trustworthy verification, do you think that both China and the United States need to establish a baseline in a way to make initial regulation on how much fissile materials they possess at this moment? Do you think it's necessary, or if it's not necessary, then how can we establish a confidence on the cutoff commitment?

And so then also in the report, James you suggested that for the verification, China and the United States should utilize their national technical means. And I wonder if China has the capacity which would be able to meet satisfactory meet the verification requirements. So, these are the questions to James' proposal.

And next I'd like to ask Tong a couple of things. First, your proposal is really excellent and the combining the INF range missile and strategic missiles house to create new arms control framework is innovative. And this was why I'll take a closer look at. But I actually read your article on Arms Control Today, and I got a couple of issues from that article as well.

I agree that, I think that in your proposal, you also said if U.S. objective is to seek and gain the competitive advantage vis-a-vis China through arms control, then China would not accept any deal and the China needs equality on an equal and fair proposal.

And I agree, and I'm sure that China would not really buy the idea of arms control modality, which put itself in a disadvantageous position. So I think that is a very important elements or the principle that the arms control between China and United States seek, and obviously, acquiring competitive advantage is often the hitting agenda for the arms control, but at the same time it should not be explicit like I know in the previous administration of the United States.

So then on this combining INF and the strategic missiles, I wonder if that is, what sort of the concept of strategic stability are you based on? As Fiona outlined, the current complex strategic environment in East Asia involves the strategic nuclear conventional entanglement, which is defined by James and also a lot of other capabilities and emerging technologies, including missile defense, cyber space and so forth.

So then, do you think it's sufficient enough to only combine INF range missiles and the strategic missiles to putting into the arms control framework, or do we have to seek more comprehensive framework or do we just simply cut off these two nuclear capabilities from other capabilities? And I wonder if it's possible to not. And then also, once again, from Tong's paper in Arms Control Today, he suggested United States and Russia should invite Chinese observers to the U.S. verification activities. Now Open Sky Treaty is dead.

And then, the verification activities based on the New START is subject to the reextension, but I think it's a very good idea because I think that kind of activities probably, would be a very important process for educating Chinese strategic community on the usefulness and importance of verification, transparency, and also it is useful for U.S. and Russian search community to encounter different such cultures. And that will facilitate mutual understanding in both different strategic communities.

So then from Japanese perspective, I think I would like to add a couple of footnotes for the advancement of the U.S.-China arms control. And first, it's about the definition of strategic stability in the Asia. As I said, the entanglement between nuclear and conventional is probably not obvious. And that actually in fact requires a lot of support and also the commitment of allies of the United States, if the U.S. would like to maintain a credible effective deterrence in the region.

So, if the Japan are okay and Australia, those allies of United States are deeply involved in the effective and up to date US deterrence, then I think inevitably, the dialogue or conversation on strategic stability or arms control modality may have to involve those allies as well. But traditionally, the nuclear arms control has been discussed only amongst the nuclear arm states. So to what extent it would be possible to involve the Asia allies of the United States in such kind of a dialogue.

And also, the secondly it seems to me that now the Biden administration puts a priority on reestablishing arms control process with Russia and view dialogue with China as a medium and the long-term item among arms control agenda. And if it frames a strategic competition with China, it actually Biden administration frames its strategic competition with China, mainly around the economic and the technological sphere.

And in this situation, how we could get started, the consultation and the dialogue on the nuclear or broader strategic arms control between China and the United States, which involves the Asian allies, hopefully from our perspective. And so I would like to ask both speakers the way or necessity of involving Asian allies with United States in such a dialogue. I stop here. Thank you.

Fiona Cunningham:

Thank you very much, Nobu for those very comprehensive remarks. I'm just going to pose one very quick question, given that we have so much on the table and limited time to get questions in from the audience as well, which actually follows on very nicely from the last point that Nobu posed, which is how much of a priority is arms control for Chinese and U.S. leaders, given the plethora of other pressing issues in the bilateral relationship that will be on the table for those leaders to take heads?

So, can the United States and China move forward on these kinds of proposals that have been put on the table by Tong and James without the President and the General Secretary making arms control a personal priority? So I'll turnover to each of the panels that we might start with James in the order that we went through to comment on that and then move to the audience questions.

James Acton:

Thanks Fiona. I will just, Nobu and Nicola you put a ton on the table and I'm not going to try and respond to everything. I just want to pick up a few critical pieces. Let me end with where you started, which is how much of a priority. I think it's clearly not a priority for Chinese leaders right now. I think it remains to be seen how much of a priority the Biden administration makes arms control with China.

I would just say as a practical matter, like I think if the president is not personally invested in this, it's definitely not going to happen. If he is personally invested in it, it's still going to be really difficult. But I think the president is going to have to engage chairman Xi directly to have any chance of any of this happening.

I think in terms of the question about engagement with allies, it's critically important that the U.S. engages allies. Whether allies are a direct participant in the negotiation, I

think depends on the proposal, right? If it's a proposal that would limit Japanese fissile material, as well as Chinese, as well as the U.S. fissile material, Japan obviously has to be there in the room.

What I'm proposing here is a purely U.S.-Chinese bilateral agreement. So it would just be the U.S. and China in the room negotiating the details, but that doesn't in no way preclude having very intensive allied consultations on the side of any bilateral negotiations and actually the INF negotiations in Europe, I think are a nice example of that.

I'd finally say that in terms of... because I think the question Nobu nobody raises about the separation between China's civilian and military reprocessing programs. I'd make a couple of points here. China, I think is a very long way away from having a functional civilian reprocessing capability. All of the evidence we have suggests that the pilot plant China built for civilian purposes are not operational.

And China's negotiating with France to build a large-scale reprocessing facility in China. If China proceeds with that, the only solution I can think of is that it has to be under IAEA safeguards in exactly the same way that Rokkasho Reprocessing Plant in Japan is under IAEA safeguards. But we're also talking about something that is at least a decade, and frankly, I suspect a lot more, for being operational on the side.

And so, I think this is something where this could be a real issue, but I would still press on with China and try to agree to a cut off with the understanding that if China opens a civilian reprocessing plant that it would have to be under IAEA safeguards.

Fiona Cunningham:

Tong, if you want to jump in.

Tong Zhao:

Okay. I'll be very brief. My specific proposal of thinking about combining New START and INF is just one way to offer a concrete arms control model so that Chinese, American experts can start debating and discussing it otherwise our engagement is start at very empty level, something concrete would really help offering an opportunity for them to deepen and substantiate their discussions.

And that process, I think, could really be useful for developing more nuanced understandings of each other's concerns and the thinking on the policy. And this specific option is certainly not meant to be the entire arms control framework between the two countries in the future. It can be done together in parallel with other options like the fissile material cutoff proposal that James raised et cetera.

And in terms of how to bring in American allies, I think it's critically important to bring in American allies on the issue of the U.S.-China strategic stability. An important example is U.S. has been unable to move forward a no first use or sole purpose policy domestically because significantly that American allies are worried about the implications for their security.

So, I think this is where the discussion needs to be broadened to include U.S. allies. If China, for example, can provide a security assurance to American allies, for example, in the form of renouncing using a military option to resolve territorial disputes with its neighbors, I think that would really help address the security concerns of American allies towards China and may help persuade these allies to drop their opposition against the United States adopting a no first use or sole purpose, or establishing a more explicit strategic stability relationship with China. So that really benefits China, something I think could incentivize China to examine.

And lastly, on the issue of the priority of arms control in U.S. and China, as James mentioned, arms control does not seem to be the priority of Chinese leaders now, but I think it should be one of the priorities because China is also facing important economic incentives. It is cutting huge funds to support social and economic developments during a major pandemic. It really needs to save money and arms control can help doing so. And more importantly, China needs to stabilize its relationship with U.S., putting some guard rails in the bilateral relationship to avoid a very costly and dangerous arms race. And wants a more stable bilateral relationship in general, so arms control can be a very important tool for China to advance its interests in those areas. But the way to do it as James said is to directly engage with Chinese leaders, the only a person that matters in the Chinese system.

Fiona Cunningham:

So, I might just turn it over very briefly to Nobumasa and Nicola just a minute or so if you have comments on these particular points.

Nobumasa Akiyama:

Thank you. I wish that the Chinese policymakers have a similar thinking as Tong Zhao in present. That would be really helpful, but probably I will be now realistic about it. One thing about the declaratory policy, I think at this moment, because of the absence of confidence between the United States, China or China and U.S. allies, the declaratory policy on both sides may not be so effective in advancing arms control at this moment.

So, I think before talking about the declaratory policy, we have to have more dialogue on strategic issues as well. And also, if the transparency would be improved, particularly in

a consistency between the declaratory policy and capability re improved on China's side, then I think trust on Chinese policy or Chinese commitment will be far improved.

So, I think it is probably important from our perspective to discuss how we are going to improve the transparency on both side-, Japan, United States and China, and probably Japan on their declaratory policies and the implementation of such policies. Thank you.

Fiona Cunningham:

Nicola.

Nicola Leveringhaus:

Yeah, I'll be really brief. I don't think there's much of a priority, so I agree with, with what's been said, but I would say that if you look at past instances where China has come to the table, and of course, it's not about recreating those conditions, but certainly when outside pressure has worked, it's usually when things are going well, and China doesn't want to be seen to be missing the boat to some extent.

So, if the U.S. is serious about a bilateral arrangement, whatever the arrangement be along the report's lines or some of the great proposals that Tong talks about, it seems to me that it has to answer the question why just China, right?

If they start to engage in similar bilateral proposals with other nuclear weapons states, then perhaps that will put added pressure on China. So they either have to come up with a brilliant explanation of why just China or they need to think beyond China and whether that would create pressure perhaps on China to participate.

Fiona Cunningham:

Thank you very much to all of the panelists for those remarks. I'll turn to some questions from our audience. Thank you all very much for these terrific questions that are coming in. I'm going to group one from Hiraki Nakanishi, who's a postdoctoral fellow at Kyoto University and Brian Radinsky, who is a postdoctoral fellow at Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory, which goes to the point of post INF framework.

And so, my question, I'm going to pose it to both Tong, as well as to Nicola, is what are the merits of negotiating a post INF framework, which includes China. So a trilateral kind of proposal at the intermediate ranges of nuclear forces versus the kind of proposal that Tong you have put forward where you would be grouping together the strategic, as well as the intermediate range forces, and perhaps Nicola could comment on some of the motivational questions of doing this in a trilateral versus a bilateral context. Tong, if you want to perhaps take a stab at that first.

Tong Zhao:

Yeah, sure. Well, if we only look at a trilateral type of agreement there are still, from the Chinese perspective, then you would need to combine... you will need to look at not only land-based systems, but also air and sea based.

You can also combine these three types of weapons together so that you can somewhat address the capability asymmetry problem, but not entirely because the U.S. will still possess a huge advantage over China so it's hard to include China in such an agreement as an equal partner that's why I proposed a different type of way to combining these systems.

So, I think there are different trade-offs as long as we can make it work, and make it fair and equal and acceptable to all parties, I think that would work. So I think there are many ways we can combine different provisions and my proposal is certainly one of those possibilities.

Fiona Cunningham:

Nicola. Thanks, Tong.

Nicola Leveringhaus:

Yeah, I think both bilateral and trilateral are problematic, I don't think one is potentially better than the other. And I don't think for China, they're going to... like Tong said that whether you're grouping things and even if you say, reduce the asymmetry, then that may be on the table. I still think when you're thinking about political motivations, it's a very hard sell. It doesn't seem to be very clear what the benefits are for China to engage in that kind of negotiation.

I'm thinking back to back when the INF was negotiated and even since then, and since its breakdown, China's preoccupations are so much bigger than a bilateral, trilateral context, and you'd have to bring in, again, as I've mentioned in my initial comments, questions of alliances, in this case NATO, and I think it would be a very unwieldy quickly, quite an unwieldy dynamic for negotiations.

So, I don't see either as particularly a good way forward, unless you can provide a good enough reason for so or at least there's a domestic rationale that's sufficiently strong to push that forward in China.

Fiona Cunningham:

Thank you, Nicola and Tong. I'm going to take now a question from Twitter where our Ryan Fedasiuk, apologies if I'm mispronouncing names, and I'll direct this one to James perhaps and he asks, "Should we still aim to cap warhead totals or focus narrowly on

fissile material productions? And if we should be seeking to cap nuclear warheads, then what does one make of the U.S. five-year New START extension and what leverage in particular remains for the U.S. to negotiate with when it comes to China?"

James Acton:

Thanks Fiona. It's a great question. So we proposed this fissile material proposal precisely because we thought limits on Chinese nuclear forces at the current time were a complete non-starter. There are plenty of challenges to our proposal. I don't want to kind of be Pollyannaish about this, but to my mind, the idea of limits on Chinese nuclear forces right now are a complete non-starter.

So, in the long run, I love the idea of a single limit on a warhead, strategic, non-strategic U.S., Russian, Chinese. I think that's a great long-term goal, but that really is a long-term goal. And I would focus initially on U.S.-China in one track, U.S.-China on a separate track. And as Tong says, there's lots of ideas that one could go with the U.S. and China, our proposal is one proposal, we add to the makeover very much like Tong's idea. The question is can any proposal between the U.S. and China find traction.

In terms of how New START plays into U.S.-China, it doesn't, and it never has. China values New START I think precisely because it values limits on U.S. offensive forces, but the Trump administration's proposal of trying to hold New START's extension hostage to Chinese involvement in trilateral negotiations to my mind was never a good idea, and it was never going to work and didn't work.

And that was why the Trump administration eventually dropped that particular linkage. It maintained the other linkage, but not that particular linkage. So the key to getting China engaged is will Chinese leaders view bilateral arms control with the U.S. as being in China's interests? Can you cook something up that is mutually beneficial? And quite a lot of the discussion today has focused on what that would look like.

And actually, I think there's been a number of quite different ideas that have come out today about potential attractions for China. Fundamentally, I come back to this point that it's not up to me to define Chinese interest, is up to Chinese leaders to define Chinese interests. And I again, encourage, our Chinese colleagues and interlocutors to really have a conversation about what Beijing's ask for arms control is.

Fiona Cunningham:

Thank you very much, James. And so I'm going to take one, unfortunately, last question from the audience, because we are starting to get towards the end of our hour, and I'll

turn to each of the panelists to give them an opportunity to give a minute or two of any final remarks that they want to state.

But before I do that, I do just want to pose one last question, which I'm taking from Collins Chong from the University of Malaya. And his question I'm going to direct to Nobumasa Akiyama, relates to, "Whether or not economic sanctions and threats of sanctions might be used by the United States, presumably as one of the bargaining chips to break the impasse in U.S.-China arms control engagement. And if so, what might be the impact on allied interests in the region that might be used as retaliatory platforms for pushback and for China to signal that it's not adhering to the kinds of tactics the U.S. is engaging into encourage China into arms control?"

So, I'll put that question out there to Nobu, because I think the regional question of just how much allies in the Indo-Pacific are willing to pay, if you like to see progress and arms control is an important one that we've touched on. So Nobu if you can respond briefly and then we'll turn to everyone for some closing remarks.

Nobumasa Akiyama:

Thank you. I think that Tong could better address this question, but I think I know the China is not really probably affected by the economic sanction on nuclear policy. And also, from the allies perspective that one of the most important distinction between Cold War, U.S.-Soviet confrontation and China-U.S. confrontation is that allies of the United States are heavily economically involved in China.

And so, it is really difficult if we seriously pause to really decouple everything from China. So I think the economic sanction has very limited impact on the set agenda of arms control. Thank you.

Fiona Cunningham:

Thank you very much, Nobu. So we might start with Nicola, and then go to James, Tong and then Nobu for a last minute or a total of closing thoughts on anything else that's being put on the table that you want to address.

Nicola Leveringhaus:

Thank you very much. I would just like to add that Chinese use of arms control, I've said they're relatively skeptical, but they've also, of course, traditionally, always said the United States and Russia have primary responsibility to reduce their nuclear arsenals because they have the largest arsenals. So, China's argument is that it's too early for it to join that process.

And I think today's discussion has also shed some light on how hard this is as well. It's not just too early. The argument is it's very hard to cook up alluring proposals to incentivize China to join the table. But I think at the moment, if China's running logic is that it's too early and these two other countries, the U.S. and Russia, have primary responsibility, if the pressure does increase on China and if proposals become more developed to bring China to the table, then I think the question quickly becomes when do others join the table, right?

When do India, when do Pakistan, when do France, when maybe even North Korea. I think we need to have an answer to that, and I don't see much conversation going on in that area. So I think we need to start thinking beyond China, just as when we think about the China-U.S. context, it's not simply about the U.S.-China context either. Even if negotiations would be with just these two parties around the table.

Fiona Cunningham:

James.

James Acton:

Thanks, Fiona. Let me give two closing thoughts. Firstly, historically, China has been generally reluctant to engage in arms control, but when it's engaged, it's actually engaged pretty seriously. In addition to things like the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, which is obviously well known, there are two pretty serious, at least two that I know, arms control agreements that China has with Russia.

There is a border demarcation agreement that relates to conventional forces, sorry, it's not a border demarcation. It's an agreement limiting conventional forces in the border region. And there's also a Sino-Russian launch notification arrangement. And both of those are actually, I think, really quite serious agreements. So, I emphasize that because I think there is some precedent. As I say, it can be hard to get China to engage, but when China does engage, it can do so seriously.

I'd also raise, I think there's two different ways of thinking about what the incentives for Chinese engagement are. I don't know which one is correct or if either of them are indeed correct. One is Nicola's idea, which is you expand geographically. You bring in the other countries that China is concerned about, whether that is Japan or India or wherever else.

The other is kind of like vertically, which is you reason that maybe the reason why China doesn't want to declare a formal cutoff in fissile material is because it's worried about things like U.S. ballistic missile defense, high precision conventional weapons, the kinds

of things that can affect China's nuclear forces. And so you have to expand the context by bringing in those U.S. capabilities, right?

I don't know whether, which one of those is more attractive to China if either of them is, but I just want to point out, but I think there's these two quite different ways of thinking about how to make these things and how to make arms control attractive to China.

Fiona Cunningham:

Thanks, James. Tong and Nobu just a minute each and I'll wrap up our proceedings after that.

Tong Zhao:

Thank you. The point I want to make is I think arms control can be made beneficial to China, but China hasn't recognized that. And as a result, the outside world cannot hope to coerce China or force China into arms control, so sanctions won't work. Basically the partners have to address China's concerns et cetera.

I think there two obstacles for engaging China in arms control. One is traditional thinking within China, either the traditional insistence on secrecy and non-transparency, and the traditional suspicion of arms control. And that type of obstacles can only be removed if you have support and blessing from China's top leadership on arms control research. So, you engaging with the top leader, the importance of that cannot be overstated.

But second, today, we also need to start engaging with China to discuss specific options. So that in case there is political support and blessing, we can have concrete options to work out. For that front, there is a need to have expert level discussions on specific options. It can be bilateral, trilateral but as long as we have concrete discussions, it may help pave the way for future progress.

Fiona Cunningham:

Thank you, Tong. Nobu, bring us home.

Nobumasa Akiyama:

Yeah, thank you. I think the very important thing is that I think we or U.S., China and possibly allies should start immediately discussing on the importance of arms control. And as Tong said, I think we have to probably share the common understanding of the importance of arms control and the benefits of arms control for every stakeholder and the regional security.

And so, in that discussion, I think the United States and China really need to discuss on what are their strategic interests respectively, and how they assess the capabilities and operational doctrines of both sides so that they improve the transparency and confidence.

And at the same time, I think as James suggested maybe cutoff of the fissile material being an important, very practical step to harvest the low-hanging fruits, which will be very important steps to further advance into more substantive progress. Thank you very much.

Fiona Cunningham:

Well, thank you very much to all of the panelists and to our terrific audience for these excellent questions. I think we've had a really rich discussion this morning. One of the things that comes out clearly to me is that we still have a lot of work to do, to understand what China's motivations and that side of the story might be on engaging on arms control. I want to apologize to those audience members who posed questions we couldn't get to. We had some excellent ones on emerging technology and warhead verification.

I'm sure the panelists would be happy to field your questions via email, but I want to just end by saying, it's been an honor to moderate this discussion and to thank in particular Erin McLaughlin, Thomas MacDonald, and the Carnegie events team who've really worked behind the scenes to make this terrific event possible. Plus once again, to the Japanese Embassy in Washington, D.C. Thank you all very much for a terrific discussion. I look forward to continuing.