

Carnegie International
Nonproliferation Conference
Washington DC
June 25-26, 2007

China's Nuclear Strategy

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Problems

- Misinterpret Chinese research on nuclear strategy;
- Over predict and overreact to China's nuclear development;
- Inappropriately challenge China's No-First-Use

Problems in Understanding China's Nuclear Strategy

Terminological problems

- Chinese translation of “Deterrence” is “wei-she”;
- “wei-she” does not mean deterrence;
- “wei-she” means coercion: to force others to yield to oneself;
- China's nuclear strategy has been described as “counter-coercion”: not to yield to a nuclear rival.

Bad western education

- Theory of nuclear deterrence flew to China in 1980s;
- Minimum deterrence is used to describe China's No-First-Use pledge;
- Some Chinese scholars became to believe minimum nuclear deterrence

Differences between Minimum Deterrence & Counter-coercion

Deterrence

1. Rational choice (benefit/cost calculation)
2. Nuclear attack number one threat;
3. McNamara criterion for unacceptable damage;
4. Constant alert;

Counter-coercion

1. Paper tiger theory ~ nuclear taboo theory;
2. Nuclear coercion number one threat;
3. Have retaliatory capability necessary;
4. Off alert

Differences between Minimum Deterrence & Counter-coercion

Deterrence

1. Failure: a nuclear attack comes;
2. Consequence: extremely serious
3. Response: nuclear retaliation

Counter-coercion

1. Failure: the rival becomes more aggressive and brave in diplomatic or conventional;
2. Consequence: bad
3. Response: prepare for diplomatic or conventional resistance

Summary

China's nuclear strategy

- Small number; ✓
- Few types; ✓
- Rolling deployment (deployment stops when technology mature); ?
- De-altering (warheads separated from the missiles); ✓
- Late retaliation launch (one week after receiving nuclear attack). ✓

No-First-Use

- The only possible first use in the world is last resort;
- No-First-Use much more credible than first use;
- Attempt to define the boundary of NFU weakens the nuclear taboo;
- China commits a common norm;
- Other nuclear states expect more coercive power

Why mobile

- Vulnerability adds rival's interest in coercion;
- Survivability of fixing-based ICBMs relies on numerical ambiguity;
- Numerical ambiguity decreases as time;
- Mobile missiles provide opportunities to evade intelligence

China's Nuclear Future On the Same Track

- A few more mobile ICBMs and may be a few SLBMs (?);
- Off-alert (warheads separated with the missile)

Negative factors

- Statements:
 - US preemptive strike capability 100%;
 - US missile defense effective;
 - US intelligence (space radar) perfect;
- Misleading education:
 - challenging NFU
 - promoting deterrence theory
- Actions:
 - More US nuclear targets in China (more US nuclear submarines in Pacific);
 - Explorations about usable nuclear weapons

Conclusion

- China's nuclear philosophy and strategy unique among P5;
- China's nuclear future on the same track
- Facing challenges