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As the Biden Administration considers how to respond to China's fast-growing nuclear arsenal and whether to build on the Trump Administration's nascent arms control diplomacy with China, lessons from the U.S. arms control experience during the Cold War offer strong cautions. The United States should recognize these limits, as outlined by historical experience as well as key theoreticians, and consider a palette of constraints as well as narrowed opportunities if it chooses to continue to pursue strategic arms control with China.

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MASTER OF MILITARY STUDIES

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IN ASSESSING STRATEGIC ARMS CONTROL NEGOTIATIONS WITH CHINA**

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF MILITARY STUDIES

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AY 20-21

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Executive Summary

Title: Essential Considerations in Assessing Strategic Arms Control Negotiations with China

Author: Mr. Matthew Beh, United States Department of State

Thesis: As the Biden Administration considers how to respond to China's fast-growing nuclear arsenal and whether to build on the Trump Administration's nascent arms control diplomacy with China, lessons from the U.S. arms control experience during the Cold War offer strong cautions. The United States should recognize these limits, as outlined by historical experience as well as key theoreticians, and consider a palette of constraints as well as narrowed opportunities if it chooses to continue to pursue strategic arms control with China.

Discussion: The Trump Administration move in 2019-2020 to force nuclear arms negotiations with China drew attention to the problem of China's fast-growing nuclear arsenal. The Chinese nuclear arsenal presents unique challenges, most notably, its intermingled placement and control among Chinese conventional forces poised for an Anti Access/Area Denial (A2AD) mission in the western Pacific. Experience from the Cold War shows negotiated arms control agreements in themselves have not so far successfully managed such challenges as deterrence or the problem of conventional-nuclear integration ("CNI," i.e., the comingling of nuclear and conventional arsenals and command and control functions). More critically, negotiated arms control relationships have proven unable to surpass in strength or quality the overarching political relationship between the parties. For the United States, full recognition of these caveats is critical, long before entering a negotiating process.

Conclusion: The paramount recommendation is that the U.S. continue nuclear force modernization in response to China's nuclear weapons buildup, either as an end in itself or precursor to a negotiation. Similarly, deterrence and strategic messaging are the most effective response available to China's CNI in the western Pacific. If the United States moves forward on arms control negotiations with China, it must first work to discern its own and its allies' and partners' preferred outcomes. Subsequently, the U.S. and allies should hold in clear view China's oft-expressed political goals driving its arms buildup. Moving into an actual negotiation, the U.S. should work to meet and match the unusual forms and outcomes of China's accustomed "principles-based" negotiating style. This may dictate an agreement based on hortatory statements and guided principles, or even no outcome at all. Given the broader strains in the bilateral relationship with China, the U.S. must accept the likelihood of a smaller range of negotiated arms control outcomes, including the possibility of a protracted negotiating process focused more on confidence-building than on concrete outcomes.

INTRODUCTION

The Trump Administration's 2019-2020 attempt to draw China into the U.S.-Russia New START negotiations highlighted the United States' changing view of the Chinese nuclear arsenal and its own nuclear and conventional arms posture with respect to China. Although the U.S. has through several administrations pursued a widely-noted "pivot to Asia" of conventional forces and diplomatic attention, the Chinese nuclear arsenal has seen little discussion outside policymaker communities.

The substance of the Chinese arsenal, and its growing size, are the critical concerns. Compared to the U.S. nuclear arsenal, China maintains a much smaller inventory of nuclear warheads. The arsenal includes ICBMs, missiles with ranges shorter than intercontinental, nuclear-capable bombers, and a fleet of four nuclear ballistic missile submarines.¹ Critically, unlike U.S. missiles, Chinese nuclear missiles are comingled with theater conventional forces, "often attached to the same base headquarters... likely shar[ing] transportation and supply networks, patrol routes... It is also possible that they share some command-and-control networks," as Caitlin Talmadge warns.² Compounding the problem, many Chinese missile systems are dual-use, capable of hosting either conventional or nuclear warheads, with switching operations not easily observed through reconnaissance. As Talmadge emphasizes, customary U.S. conventional warfighting practices, if applied against China, pose the risk of a response that could expand to nuclear escalation.³

As the Biden Administration considers next steps, the U.S. Cold War experience with arms control negotiations with the Soviet Union offers lessons in arms control, strategic stability, and nuclear weapons strategy. The U.S. disappointment with the 1970s Strategic Arms

Limitation Treaties (SALT) and the deterioration of the U.S. arms control relationship with Russia under Vladimir Putin correlate with the theorizing of strategists such as Colin Gray, that arms control relationships and institutions have so far been insufficient to manage key challenges of deterrence, or to strengthen or even steady a faltering political relationship. In short, the broader political relationship supersedes; arms control is politics by other means, but not vice versa. Any negotiated arms control relationship would be subordinate to and subject to the pressures of a challenging, troubled U.S.-China security relationship in the Pacific.

Following from that basic level of understanding, for the United States continued force modernization work is critical, either as a precursor to negotiation, or for its deterrent effect in itself. If the Biden Administration decides, after discernment and determination of its own goals and those of its allies, to pursue arms control negotiations with China, options for potential discussion include a range of smaller, confidence-building and exploratory steps, as well as work to further a community of nuclear arms policy experts on both sides who can share views. Weightier options worthy of eventual discussion could include space and cyber domains as well as agreeing on limits rather than force reductions. U.S. negotiators and policymakers must also give greater consideration to China's specific strategic choices, negotiating style, and bureaucratic influences, which are unique in their own right, and yet not as difficult to estimate as some outsiders have come to believe. The pressure of China's negotiating style, coupled with the limited commonality of interests on the issue between the U.S. and China, may well yield an outcome such as a "statement of principles," or a negotiating process with no clear end in itself but that would serve as a mechanism for increased understanding and some degree of shared confidence-building. Judging from prior high-level negotiations with China, China's signals of its nuclear arms control interests and pressure points may be clearer than we believe: China's

political goals with regard to Taiwan have been frequently and consistently expressed for over 80 years, and China's dual-use nuclear-conventional arsenal is predominantly positioned for use in the Taiwan context. As the U.S. looks for pressure points, China's stated discomfort over Russia's nuclear weapons modernization may be the most visible example of a potential developing point of leverage.

THE TRUMP ADMINISTRATION'S 2019-2020 DIPLOMATIC FOCUS ON CHINA'S NUCLEAR ARSENAL

In 2019 and 2020, the Trump Administration made a significant public relations effort focused on China's nuclear arsenal. Although the Administration had deemphasized strategic arms control in its 2018 Nuclear Posture Review,⁴ U.S. negotiators made a notable public effort to enlist China into the U.S.-Russia bilateral negotiation over renewing the New START Treaty. China formally rejected the offer in 2020, and Russia also criticized U.S. efforts to bring China into the discussion.

Critics charged the Trump Administration had made little of the advance diplomatic preparation typical before successful engagements.⁵ China was skeptical throughout, suggesting in 2019 that it did not want to bear the blame if the U.S. decided not to renew New START on policy grounds related to Russia.⁶ Independent commentators were also critical of the Trump Administration move, such as Tom Countryman, former Assistant Secretary of State for International Security and Nonproliferation, who called it a "poison pill, a pretext for withdrawing... or allowing it to expire" and highlighted the involvement on the U.S. side of "officials long opposed to New START."⁷

The incoming Biden Administration has announced it will seek to renew New START on a bilateral basis with Russia.⁸ At the same time, it has briefed reporters and stated at the UN Conference on Disarmament that the U.S. remains interested in "engag[ing] China on nuclear arms control and risk reduction."⁹ NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg and outside analysts also continue to call for strategic arms transparency and arms control with China.¹⁰

The current inventory of major U.S. arms control agreements with China is limited to multilateral efforts, starting with China's 1992 ratification of the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty and extending through the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, Convention on the Physical Protection of Nuclear Material, the Chemical and Biological Weapons Conventions, and the International Convention for the Suppression of Acts of Nuclear Terrorism.¹¹

In response to the 2019-2020 effort by the United States, China arguably had little incentive to join the U.S.-Russia interaction in any event. With an arsenal so much smaller than that of the U.S. or Russia, analysts suggest China had little to gain from limits; China may even have missed a public relations opportunity to demand the U.S. lower its forces to China's level.¹²

Additionally, as Countryman noted to Congress in 2019, the U.S. did not work to define the substance of any agreement it wanted China to consider. Countryman explained that, in terms of potential agreements, one choice would be for China to commit to the New START limitations imposed on Russia and the U.S. Countryman considered this approach a non-starter, as it would mean the U.S. giving its imprimatur to China increasing its weapons by the thousands, something "hardly in our interest;" alternatively, according to Countryman, the U.S. and Russia would have to agree to reduce arsenals to the level of China's, which is equally hard to imagine.¹³ (Although Countryman did not raise the possibility of negotiated asymmetric

reductions or limits, the U.S. experience with asymmetric limits in SALT drew extended and effectively mortal criticism.)

THE PROBLEM: THE GROWING CHINESE NUCLEAR ARSENAL AND ITS UNIQUE CHARACTERISTICS

In aspects from technical, to cultural, to diplomatic, the Chinese arsenal is different from the Soviet-era nuclear arsenal, presenting a slate of new and unfamiliar challenges:

- recent faster growth in number of missiles and warheads, after decades without a significant increase in numbers;
- China's intermingling of command and other functions with its portfolio of conventional missiles (alongside a conventional portfolio similarly growing at a rapid pace);
- Chinese placement of missiles and warheads among conventional armaments, the very same emplacements likely to be targeted by the United States in event of a conflict over Taiwan or the South China Sea;
- a shallower U.S. understanding of Chinese nuclear arms strategies, due in part to narrower unofficial discussions and a less developed community and pattern of interchange among U.S. and Chinese nuclear arms strategists, when compared to U.S.-Russian experiences during and after the Cold War; and
- a seeming lack of economic or strategic incentives for China to enter into nuclear arms constraints or reductions, in contrast to the U.S.-Soviet Cold War shared realization that both sides had sufficient weapons to achieve Mutually Assured Destruction several times over.

Although China's warhead inventory is much smaller than that of the United States, it is growing quickly. The Department of Defense in its 2020 report on the Chinese military estimated an arsenal of operational Chinese warheads in the "low 200s." The Federation of American Scientists put the number at 350 as it added to its count those warheads yet to be fielded.¹⁴ The Stockholm International Peace Research Institute and the Arms Control Association estimated China's total stockpile of warheads at 320 in 2020, up from 260 in 2015.¹⁵ As Figure 1 highlights, China may be third in world nuclear warhead stockpiles, edging out France and the U.K. Nevertheless, China's arsenal is an order of magnitude smaller than that of the U.S., at 5800, or the leader, Russia, with 6375, according to the Arms Control Association count.

China missile inventory -- whether nuclear-tipped, conventional, or dual-use -- is much larger, as highlighted in Table 1, estimated by DOD at up to several thousand. China's Short-Range Ballistic Missiles (SRBMs) predominate, with 1000-1200 that are believed to be largely conventionally armed but may be dual-use.

The worry for U.S. policymakers is not just the numbers, but also the growth of the Chinese arsenal in recent years, set against a Chinese conventional arms arsenal similarly increasing in numbers and potency. Although U.S. government sources have in the past been overeager in predicting increased in Chinese nuclear warhead construction, U.S. government experts and outside analysts such as the *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* now agree in seeing a rise in the Chinese arsenal, perhaps even a doubling, over approximately the last two decades. Figure 2 highlights the actual increase in the Chinese arsenal in recent years, along with prior U.S. government analyses that prematurely anticipated the rise.

The Chinese arsenal is particularly destabilizing in that the shorter-ranged Chinese nuclear missiles are managed by command-and-control and other nuclear arsenal functions that are comingled with controls over theater conventional forces.¹⁶ With siting and basing, command and control, and other critical elements shared among nuclear and conventional missiles, analysts see a greater risk of the weapons being destroyed, purposefully or inadvertently, in event of a conflict. Worryingly, this risk in itself raises incentives for China to use the weapons before they are lost.¹⁷

An additional significant concern for the U.S. is interoperability: the missiles may be armed with either conventional or nuclear warheads in a manner difficult to distinguish through reconnaissance.¹⁸ (The U.S. and allies face a similar dual-use missile challenge from Russia in the form of the ground-launched Iskander cruise missiles in Kaliningrad, which Russia says could be used to deliver nuclear or conventional payloads against U.S. missile defenses based in Europe.¹⁹)

Talmadge cautions that the net effect is customary U.S. conventional warfighting practices, if applied against China, pose the risk of a response that could see China forced to respond with nuclear escalation, under a "use or lose" scenario.²⁰ Arguably, as in many other areas of potential conflict between the U.S., China, and Russia, the risk of a nuclear arms confrontation rises in tandem with the risk of a conventional confrontation.

In addition to a different nuclear weapons portfolio and an unusual mix of collocated emplacement and control systems, China's nuclear arms doctrine is arguably less well-known to the rest of the world than Russian doctrine, and certainly less well-understood than that of the U.S. and its allies. For instance, China proclaims it maintains a "nonaggressive" doctrine and declares a "no first use" policy.²¹ But Western analysts express skepticism as to whether China's

no first use policy can be trusted, given its status as an authoritarian state and the U.S. post-Cold War understanding that Soviet-era declared statements of no first use may well have been insincere.²² (By contrast, the U.S. has declined to state a "no-first-use" policy. The U.S. considers nuclear weapons a potentially necessary tool to counter a conventional force imbalance, such as the superiority the Soviets enjoyed in Europe during much of the Cold War.)

With U.S.-Chinese interactions among nuclear weapons policy experts less frequent or in-depth than contemporary U.S.-Russian or Cold War U.S.-Soviet interactions, U.S. experts do not know to what extent Chinese leadership may see some of these nuclear weapons policy flaws as positive features. With its relatively small force mix, usable for Anti Access/Area Denial in the western Pacific but with a notable ICBM component as well, China's nuclear arsenal has been described by one analyst as calling to mind the French strategist Andre Beaufre's views. Beaufre promoted the theory of use of tactical nuclear weapons as offering the escalatory benefit of a last, penultimate, intermediate step, antecedent to full nuclear war.²³ Whether this is China's intention or not, the uncertainty of it is sufficient to vex U.S. planners.

TO ARMS CONTROL OR NOT TO ARMS CONTROL

Historical parallels and models offer useful lessons and cautions, including the U.S. Cold War experience in arms control negotiations with the Soviet Union. The scholarship of Colin Gray, among others, presents some hard-headed arguments and case studies offering skepticism about the utility of negotiated arms control, arguments that are difficult to counter.

Lessons from the Cold War start from an analysis of whether the U.S.-Soviet strategic arms agreements were successful, and if so, why. Gray argues that the Cold War saw mutual

awareness by both superpowers that the high-stakes of a nuclear exchange were the precondition for successful arms control agreements.²⁴ As Lawrence Freedman elaborates, “in conditions of nuclear stalemate, arsenals of these tremendously powerful weapons tend to cancel each other out.”²⁵ Gray adds a caution, noting that the 1970s-1980s saw arms control attempts in which states

share[d] a common expectation that major war among them is all but unthinkable [and found] it possible to sign-on for quite drastic regimes of arms limitation. But, conversely, arms control regimes worthy of the name cannot function when they are needed, and they fail for the same reasons that they are needed.²⁶

By these lights, the U.S.-Chinese nuclear arms relationship and imbalance of forces do not offer sufficient of an analogy to the U.S.-Soviet Cold War nuclear weapons balance. The Cold War saw an unthinkable nuclear conflict that in the view of both sides courted termination via Mutually Assured Destruction. By contrast, the U.S.-China force correlation might be winnable by one side, the U.S., in a nuclear conflict, yet winnable by the other, China, in a conventional conflict confined to the western Pacific. In short, with no indication the contemporary U.S. and Chinese nuclear arsenals cancel each other out, the Cold War precondition of mutual awareness of tremendously high stakes is not met.

In a further warning to the present day, Gray and Freedman emphasize that a weapon of any type is inherently a political instrument, subordinate to political masters. As Gray argues, an arms control relationship cannot carry or reverse a strained political relationship. The U.S.-Soviet experience of the 1970s and 1980s illustrates that arms control relationships cannot solve broader relationship problems.²⁷ Freedman offers similar themes, noting that “moves made in the name of deterrence are still part and parcel of a wider political relationship.”²⁸ Applying these lessons to U.S.-China arms control, it does not appear that the current bilateral relationship would argue for decreased deployment of nuclear weapons or missiles.

One could set against these arguments the classic security dilemma: that worsening perceptions of each other in the U.S. and China could foster a spiral of competing political/military moves and arms procurements. Here too, the United States and the Soviet Union have covered this ground before. Throughout the Cold War, U.S. leaders wrestled with the challenge of assuring security versus working against setting a competitive spiral of arms procurements that would have the effect of making both sides feel less safe.

In the broader context of U.S. perspectives on China's nuclear arsenal, another critical piece is the classic question of extended deterrence: whether the U.S. would indeed use nuclear weapons in defense of an ally, or to defend Taiwan, a partner provided security under U.S. domestic law through the Taiwan Relations Act. The extended deterrence challenge has been with us since nearly the start of the Cold War: Freedman describes that

in an unguarded comment in 1956, [Secretary of State] Dulles revealed that he had already found it necessary to rely on his capacity to demonstrate resolve – even when on the brink of a catastrophic war – rather than on nuclear superiority...²⁹

Freedman adds that in 1959 Secretary of State Christian Herter said to a Senate committee, "I cannot conceive of any President engaging in all-out nuclear war unless we were in danger of all-out devastation ourselves."³⁰ Illustrating the challenge, the State Department followed Herter's comments with instructions to U.S. embassies to inform NATO ally countries that

this statement was made in context of series of questions dealing with hypothetical possibility whether deliberate shooting down of a U.S. aircraft might be considered reason for precipitating nuclear war, time factors involved, and role of U.S. Congress in declaration of war. Within context do not believe this passage should cause confusion... Of course interpretation that it confirms a reservation on part of U.S. is wholly foreign to Secretary's views and intent... If queried, U.S. officials... should emphasize U.S. determination to honor its NATO commitments.³¹

The dilemma of extended deterrence extends right up to the present day. As Elbridge Colby wrote in 2018,

A country trying to defend its home territory may be able to convince opponents that it will risk nuclear annihilation to avoid foreign occupation. But for Washington, which is trying to help defend far-flung allies against foreign aggression, such threats are far less credible. As one U.S. official quoted former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger as saying, "Great powers don't commit suicide for their allies."³²

Extended deterrence in the U.S.-China context suggests the U.S. threat of nuclear force may not be perceived as a credible response to China's conventional or nuclear force. This is a dilemma in itself. Negotiating limits to Chinese and U.S. arsenals will not resolve for U.S. allies and partners the conundrum of whether and how the U.S. will respond in a crisis that disproportionately affects them. Additionally, in the context of arms control negotiations, the challenge of extended deterrence may create a stronger incentive for the U.S. to pursue arms control than for China, granting China an advantage in a negotiation. This could even have the doubly adverse impact of signaling to U.S. allies and partners that the U.S. may have a desire to decrease security and weapons commitments within the region.

The question of arms control itself is worth asking: is it an end in itself, or only a tool to use in pursuit of broader security or other goals? Relatedly, what is the necessary supporting environment for arms control? Gray warns that, "when peace breaks out arms control is sure to follow,"³³ which is a pleasant aphorism but was more succinctly put by Winston Churchill in his 1934 warning to Parliament that "it is the greatest possible mistake to mix up disarmament with peace. When you have peace you will have disarmament."³⁴ Writing in 1993, Gray noted that "an arms control process, even a disarmament process, worked in a promising way... with gathering momentum, after 1986-1987... Arms control can only till fields already cleared by hard political labor."³⁵ Freedman, looking back at the Cold War from 2009, similarly noted that

the manner of the Cold War's conclusion confirmed that cooperative agreements on armed forces are shaped by, rather than shape, core political relations. Thus, the conditions obtained in the late 1980s made traditional arms control and even measures of

disarmament more possible to achieve but also rendered the agreements largely irrelevant.³⁶

In sum, by the time a counterparty is ready to negotiate strategic effective arms control in any environment short of Mutually Assured Destruction, the underlying political disputes are likely to have been resolved in any event. The relative success of U.S.-Russia arms control efforts during the 1990s proves the point: an improved bilateral relationship permitted genuine arms control breakthroughs, such as the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty. The reverse was not true: the 1970s-1980s experience with SALT left the U.S., at least, cynical about arms control and concerned over perceived Soviet cheating.

In the 1990s, U.S.-Russia bilateral relations were at a relative high point in comparison to preceding decades and the current era and substantive differences were fewer. Similarly, the increasing strains in U.S.-Russia arms control over the past two decades, as relations have deteriorated during the tenure of Vladimir Putin, suggest U.S.-China arms control efforts will not be fruitful until the broader U.S.-China relationship has less conflict and rivalry.

Gray stresses the need to consider the ultimate ends and goals of arms deployment as well as of arms negotiations. He describes two paradoxes of arms control; the first is the theoretical supposition that two rivals cooperate to control arms because survival depends on it. In this first paradox, Mutually Assured Destruction is the essential foundation for successful arms control.

But in Gray's second paradox, the underlying forces and issues that drive rivalry also render arms control unachievable.³⁷ As China strengthens its mix of conventional and nuclear warheads, the substantive issue for the United States is not military, in terms of the arms themselves, but political, in the form of the U.S. commitment to defend Taiwan and U.S. allies, as well as freedom of navigation and other principles imperiled by China's maritime, cyberspace,

and political grabs. Viewed through Gray's lens, the cause of this conflict is not Chinese or U.S. nuclear or conventional arms, but the wide gap between U.S. and Chinese regional goals. This gap is far beyond the ability of an arms control agreement to solve conclusively.

Arms control as an end in itself is worth questioning. John Lewis Gaddis documents the turn of opinion among U.S. experts, policymakers, and the general public against U.S.-Soviet arms control negotiations during the 1970s.³⁸ This suggests to today's analyst the risk of a U.S. Administration again getting too far ahead of opinion, as a more considered view of the calculus of arms control may later give way to skepticism. As Gaddis notes, the 1972 Moscow Summit saw Nixon and Brezhnev sign caps on numbers of ICBMs and SLBMs in the form of the Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty (SALT), as well as the related Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty (ABMT), barring “anything other than symbolic defenses against such missiles.”³⁹ In a notable move later seized upon by critics, the SALT caps were asymmetric, leaving the U.S. with fewer missiles, “justified... on the grounds that (U.S.) missiles were more accurate than their Soviet counterparts and in large part equipped with multiple warheads.”⁴⁰

But opinion in the U.S. moved against SALT and its lack of limits on warheads, even against the backdrop of highly visible follow-on negotiations and the dramatic 1979 SALT II signing by Carter and Brezhnev, as

by that time the whole arms control process was under fire from critics within both the Democratic and Republican parties who claimed that it had accomplished nothing toward reducing the nuclear danger, that it had endangered western security by allowing improvements in Soviet capabilities, and that it was unverifiable.⁴¹

In the end, SALT II was never ratified. The shift in opinion in the United States among the public and policymakers played a significant role, as did continuing Soviet offensive actions, such as the invasion of Afghanistan later in 1979. (Despite not being ratified, the treaty was observed by both sides until 1986.⁴²) Arguably, overriding political perspectives in both

countries doomed further negotiations on arms control and gave a negative tint to assessments of SALT.

In a further caution for the present day, SALT was arguably hobbled from the outset. As Gaddis notes,

it is now almost forgotten (perhaps even by themselves) that Richard Nixon and Henry Kissinger had originally portrayed the SALT I negotiations as a way to reduce the effects of America's military decline, stemming from a Soviet strategic buildup in the mid-1960s, to which the United States, because of the Vietnam War, had at first been too distracted and then too divided to respond. Arms control carried with it the tacit assumption that, in this situation, SALT was, at best, a way of minimizing the damage.⁴³

Following from this perspective, the United States should first discern for itself the end-goals of an arms control negotiation with China, including what strategic set of choices are driving the U.S. interest in negotiation.

A critical 1970s argument against SALT was that it was insufficient to prevent important improvements in Soviet nuclear arms capabilities. Gray gives this a further theoretical underpinning, noting a broad tendency for negotiated arms control strictures to distort military tools and drive resources toward less-regulated weapons lines.⁴⁴ A contemporary example could be Russia's development of a nuclear-propelled, nuclear-tipped cruise missile, an unregulated gap in the current arms control framework. In the fast-paced, high-innovation environment of U.S.-Chinese military competition, negotiated strictures could serve as a dangerous hindrance to U.S. weapons innovation and deployment.

Still, if arms control is "prone to reflect the immediate political needs of negotiators and to have a political logic of its own," as Gray's puts it,⁴⁵ might policymakers reverse or channel this Western pressure for constructive arms control with China? Could policymakers use momentum and sentiment in favor of arms control to push for a narrow-bore dialogue that aims for confidence-building in itself, strengthened expert-level dialogue on nuclear arms, and a

Chinese civilian apparatus with a better institutionalized knowledge of nuclear arms policy at the expert-, rather than the political-, level? After all, as Gaddis notes, President Reagan, not originally a supporter of arms control, found success with the Soviets by negotiating from strength, with a conventional military buildup, and by pursuing strategic innovations such as deploying Pershing II missiles in Europe and beginning research on the "Star Wars" Strategic Defense Initiative.⁴⁶ Gray might offer a strong caution, noting a repeated tendency of democracies to lower or remove funding for weapons that are potentially open to reductions even before a negotiated agreement has been reached.⁴⁷

Looking at the issue from the other side, Tom Countryman offered a precis of arguments in favor of arms control in 2019, testifying before a House Foreign Affairs subcommittee that

talking to an adversary... is not a sign of weakness, but a... means to reduce threats... Treaties provide rules of the road... they constrain other nations' ability to act against our interests more than they constrain U.S. freedom of action... Arms control agreements are not a concession made by the United States, or a favor... but an essential component of, and contribution to, our national security. In a world in which the U.S. claims global leadership, Washington must take the lead bilaterally and multilaterally, proposing initiatives that greatly reduce the risk that weapons of mass destruction (WMD) spread or are used. The pursuit of reductions of nuclear stockpiles and the eventual elimination of nuclear weapons is both a moral obligation, and since approval by the U.S. Senate of the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty in 1969, it is a legal obligation as well, one that can and must be pursued regardless of the ups and downs of great-power relations. There can be no winners in a nuclear war. Mutual assured destruction is not a theory, or a philosophy; it is a reality...⁴⁸

From this set of statements, after parsing out moralistic and normative arguments and arguments focused at partners rather than adversaries, the sole essential overlap between Countryman and Gray is the assessment that arms control agreements can be a response to an environment characterized by Mutually Assured Destruction.

But unlike in the U.S.-Russia dynamic, in the U.S.-China nuclear arms correlation of forces China is inferior and cannot ensure itself a no-victors outcome in event of nuclear war.

This may be why China is pursuing a significant nuclear weapons build-up. This, coupled with China's political goals with regard to Taiwan, may well preclude China's entering structurally meaningful nuclear arms agreements, as negotiated arms control agreements would do nothing to address China's concerns or those of the U.S.

U.S. CONFRONTS CONVENTIONAL-NUCLEAR INTEGRATION (CNI)... (AGAIN)

The comingling of conventional and nuclear weaponry is a dilemma the United States has confronted before. In 1985 Hugh O'Donnell assessed U.S. Navy Secretary John Lehman's naval expansion and push for an offensive role on NATO's Northern Flank in the Norwegian and Barents seas in event of a Soviet conventional attack into Western Europe. One argument against a NATO naval push on the Northern Flank was that U.S. conventional forces would encounter and potentially sink Soviet nuclear-powered attack submarines and ballistic missile subs. As O'Donnell notes, Lehman critic Barry Posen "believed that even the inadvertent sinking of a few Soviet SSBNs would appear to the Soviets as a deliberate counterforce strike against their strategic nuclear reserve and could generate an escalation from the conventional to the nuclear level."⁴⁹ Arguing against Posen's concern was that the Soviets would have incentive to keep the conflict conventional to avoid nuclear destruction of the Soviet homeland. In addition, the context and scene of the fight matters. As O'Donnell notes,

Posen's nightmarish vision of a Kremlin enraged about an attack on the Soviet homeland is less than convincing if one considers that such an event would surely come at some point after Soviet invaders have laid to waste much of the urban industrial heartland of Western Europe.⁵⁰

Similarly, a Chinese nuclear escalation following U.S. conventional destruction of its missiles could only occur concomitant to a conventional offensive initiated by China.

In the contemporary environment, Justin Anderson and James McCue have analyzed the challenge of China, as well as Russia and North Korea, continuing to employ commingled conventional and nuclear forces. Anderson and McCue note that, in contrast to a Cold War that saw U.S. adversary Russia with a conventional force advantage, in the current environment the U.S. holds conventional force advantage.⁵¹ They also highlight a unifying theme across the Cold War and the current era: the use by adversaries of this comingling, also known as conventional-nuclear integration (CNI), as a tool to weaken U.S. and allied cohesion and cast doubt on extended deterrence.

Anderson and McCue describe a policy environment in which CNI is in itself China's statement of willingness to employ a "nuclear coercion" strategy against the U.S. and allies.⁵²

China's implicit statement is grounded in the fact it

currently fields the world's largest arsenal of medium- and intermediate-range conventional and nuclear-capable missiles. While [China] long restricted its nuclear forces to a relatively small number of silo-based intercontinental ballistic missiles... it now deploys multiple mobile nuclear-capable delivery systems... includ[ing] the DF-26... [which] DOD states is "capable of rapidly swapping conventional and nuclear warheads"... [China] assigns brigades of conventional and dual-capable delivery systems to shared bases, appears to deploy and/or exercise these brigades in overlapping areas, and is increasingly training its personnel in how to use both.⁵³

Anderson and McCue postulate likely rationales for Chinese CNI as preventing a regional conflict setback from becoming a rout; presenting options for an allowable, in-theater use of nuclear weapons in a way that would not force a U.S. strategic nuclear response; as a point of pressure against in-region U.S. allies considering permitting U.S. use of ports and bases in event of a conflict; and to complicate U.S. planning, rules of engagement, and targeting.⁵⁴ Here too, negotiating away China's CNI through an arms control agreement appears to offer little chance of success.

Anderson and McCue note language in the Department of Defense *2018 Nuclear Posture Review (NPR)* recognizing the CNI threat and calling for U.S. "combatant commands and Service components... to integrate U.S. nuclear and non-nuclear forces to operate in the face of adversary nuclear threats and employment."⁵⁵ The U.S. counter for CNI, according to Anderson and McCue, should not be a mirror of Chinese CNI. While Chinese CNI is an instrument of coercion and aggression in reordering regional security arrangements, U.S. use of CNI must be as a contributor and sign of commitment to regional stability.⁵⁶

Specific elements of the U.S. counter to CNI, according to Anderson and McCue, include theater missile defense; selective hardening, dispersal, and redundancy of military assets; public exercises and personnel training to prepare and display defensive responses to a theater nuclear attack; robust strategic communications, including warning against breaking the nuclear weapons taboo; and strengthened intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance capabilities for detecting warheads, building on improved technical capabilities over the last thirty years.⁵⁷ (In this vein, as Anderson and McCue cite, "in 1989 U.S. and Russian scientists, as part of a joint effort to develop verification tools for future nuclear arms control agreements, successfully demonstrated that a helicopter equipped with a neutron detector could find a nuclear weapon stored inside a surface ship from a range of 100–150 meters."⁵⁸) All told, whether against Russia in 1985 or China in 2021, countering adversary CNI is no easy task but requires the classic tools of military preparedness and strategic communications to show resolve.

U.S. NUCLEAR FORCE MODERNIZATION AND DETERRENCE --

A PRECURSOR TO NEGOTIATION, OR AN END IN ITSELF

Just as the Chinese CNI threat argues for a range of deterrence measures in response, the broader U.S.-China nuclear arms balance strongly suggests the U.S. must continue force modernization, whether in support of a negotiation or continued deterrence. As Colby argues, regardless of whether the U.S. builds on or leaves behind the abortive 2019-2020 attempt to negotiate nuclear arms control with China, the U.S. should maintain work to modernize its arsenal in order to support a healthy deterrent and ensure allies continue to see the U.S. as an active security guarantor.⁵⁹ Efforts by the Trump Administration to modernize the U.S. arsenal included

upgrading... legacy nuclear warheads with new designs, as well as updating its fleet of nuclear-capable bombers, submarines and ICBMs. [In 2020] the Pentagon deployed for the first time the W76-2, a low-yield variant of the nuclear warhead traditionally used on the Trident submarine launched missile, and early design work is being done on another new submarine launched warhead design, known as the W93.⁶⁰

Experts argue for modernizing nuclear weapons as well as conventional forces in the region, noting and working as best as possible around the challenge of limited appetite for basing among U.S. allies.⁶¹

In a recent speech, U.S. Air Force General Timothy Ray, commander of the Air Force Global Strike Command, emphasized the value of continued modernization of the nuclear triad -- ICBMs, submarine-launched missiles, and nuclear-armed bombers -- for its image "in the minds of our partners and allies." He highlighted the need for a "visible dimension of a triad, an element of it that would be committed to a regional issue, to remind our partners and allies, and certainly our would-be adversaries, that it's there."⁶²

Notably, whether or not the U.S. modernizes its forces, China is continuing to. The U.S. reportedly briefed NATO allies in autumn 2020 that China is rapidly expanding plutonium and uranium plants and several nuclear weapons development facilities to support its crash program

to add warheads.⁶³ Continued U.S. force modernization will be an important contributor to allies' and partners' perceptions of U.S. commitment.

ATTEMPTING TO READ THE P.R.C. AS A STRATEGIC ACTOR

In assessing and responding to the strategic challenge posed by China, U.S. policymakers are assessing behavior that may be rooted in cultural, strategic, and bureaucratic/organizational influences. Such influences may include China-specific strategic traditions, such as Sun Tzu's writings and the schools of thought associated with them; classic, universal moves of strategic and military misdirection and deception, common across cultures; and a still-underdeveloped Chinese bureaucracy that, on nuclear arms policy in particular, remains relatively undermanned, constrained in authority, and unused to interaction with the outside world.

President Trump's Secretary of State, Michael Pompeo, and his nuclear arms negotiator, Ambassador Marshall Billingslea, were indirectly wrestling with these challenges when they complained in January 2021 about China's nuclear arms expansion, accurately noting

the United States and other democracies uphold transparency and respect for international norms governing nuclear weapons. We participate in robust and reliable crisis communication networks with other nuclear powers, and we've encouraged Beijing to do the same. We also publicly release our Nuclear Posture Review, and we conduct biannual data exchanges with Russia on nuclear issues. Both France and the United Kingdom regularly produce statements detailing the numbers and types of nuclear weapons in their arsenals. China refuses to adopt these processes, instead clinging to secrecy as its preferred strategy.⁶⁴

Cultural, strategic, and bureaucratic factors may explain much of China's nuclear arms behavior.

The analysts George Perkovich and Pranay Vaddi explain that

Chinese officials and analysts are... chary of the intrusive verification requirements that the United States (and Russia) traditionally demand with arms control. In their view, the United States would use transparency and verification measures to enhance targeting of

China's smaller arsenal. As the weaker party—one whose government tightly controls information—China feels that opacity enhances the survivability of its deterrent. This tendency may be exacerbated by the lack of institutional knowledge and experience with verification within the Chinese government, especially at the highest levels. Unlike the United States and Russia, China lacks large cadres of diplomats, military officers, and scientists deeply versed in arms control and verification.⁶⁵

Still, the cultural drivers of China's strategic behavior have limits and should not be overstated. Put in other terms, the U.S. may have a tendency to overstate or overattribute to China a form of exceptionalism in which China is seen as having unique and unknowable strategic interests. U.S. failure to act on the historic Sino-Soviet rift is a significant example. In 1949, 23 years before the joint U.S.-China Shanghai Communique, U.S. analysts were -- only behind closed doors -- pondering how to exploit the inevitable strategic differences between a newly Communist China and Stalin's Soviet Union. With Secretary of Defense Louis Johnson pressing to spend part of a multimillion-dollar aid package on limited operations to counter Chinese Communists firmly in power on the mainland,⁶⁶ State Department officials countered with NSC 49/2, a more subtle U.S. strategy for managing the new P.R.C. over time. NSC 49/2, which was approved by President Truman, called for "action in such a manner as will appeal to the Asiatic nations as being compatible with their national interests... the U.S. [should] exploit, through appropriate political, psychological and economic means, any rifts between the Chinese Communists and the USSR... it should be realized that it would be inappropriate for the United States to adopt a posture more hostile or policies more harsh towards a Communist China than towards the USSR itself." NSC 49/2 even went on to contemplate U.S. recognition of the P.R.C., though with steps "to make it clear that recognition should not be construed as approval of the Chinese regime."⁶⁷

The Sino-Soviet split and elements of China's strategic self-interest were clear to the Western analytical eye even during diplomatic non-recognition and constrained communication,

but it took years before the United States was able to leverage the find. Richard Solomon argues for negotiations and discussions with a "scrutable" China, in a reversal of the old phrase, and emphasizes the necessity of analyzing China's internal political dynamic. On the question of compelling or convincing China to reduce the growth of its nuclear arsenal, the U.S. must return to analysis of China's broader political goals, which in the case of its missile inventory seem squarely focused on Taiwan and other territorial and sea claims as well as prevention of a U.S. forcible reentry in the region. For the U.S. analyst attempting to read the P.R.C. as a strategic actor and assessing the P.R.C.'s strategic and theater nuclear weapons arsenal, the P.R.C.'s deployment of military force is driven by its regional political goals.

POTENTIAL FORMS AND ELEMENTS OF A NEGOTIATION

If the United States pursues arms control negotiations with China, whether as a confidence-building measure or an end in itself, the palette of discussion points could be more diverse, less substantive, and in a sense softer than the U.S.-Soviet and U.S.-Russia arms control negotiating processes and outcomes. Possibilities run from such overlapping choices as U.S. arsenal modernization and a strengthened deterrent posture, to increased Track 1.5 and Track 2 and other discussions, to mutually agreed caps, to the U.S. considering possible components before potentially deeper discussions.

The Chinese nuclear threat and the range of potential United States responses have seen relatively little public airing. This is all the more surprising given bitter, front-page bilateral economic disputes and a protracted U.S. pivot of conventional forces to the Pacific, against the backdrop of the U.S. and China finding a new great power rivalry over at least the last four

years. Nevertheless, the range of potential U.S. responses to the China nuclear arms challenge is broad and the diversity of views among U.S. partners and adversaries is considerable. The selection of possible next steps needs significant airing and consideration before the U.S. and allies can attain consensus and move forward with a consistent and enduring strategy.

Looking forward from the 2019-2020 U.S.-Russia New START discussion, actionable next steps for the U.S. to pursue arms control with China could encompass elements of many approaches, from refocusing on the U.S. arsenal and deterrence, to concrete proposals such as limiting and monitoring intermediate-range missiles in-region, to dialogues in various forms, to wrestling with such weighty issues as missile defense and space- and cyber-domain issues.

U.S. official comments have noted as an option the blunt-force approach of outspending China in the absence of a deal. In the words of U.S. Ambassador Billingslea, “we know how to spend the adversary into oblivion. If we have to, we will, but we sure would like to avoid it.”⁶⁸ Still, even in light of the current U.S. nuclear force modernization effort, with a roughly 10:1 advantage over China already it is not clear what or how the U.S. would spend to obtain greater certainty. Additionally, given periodic changes in U.S. Administration and U.S. policy on arms control in general, the continuity of any U.S. shift to outspending could not be assured in the out-years. (Relatedly, there is no indication Ambassador Billingslea's comment was grounded in consultation with Congressional and Administration budget officials and other relevant constituencies.)

As in any negotiation, China as the counterparty will be interested in early discussions of negotiation topics and potential goals. Reflecting in 2020 on the Trump Administration effort to draw China into New START, Chinese analyst Tong Zhao expressed a hope that proposals on entering negotiations would in future be more concrete.⁶⁹ Put succinctly, future negotiations

will need advance diplomatic work behind the scenes to attempt to discern areas of possible agreement.

Rose Gottemoeller, President Obama's Undersecretary of State for Arms Control and International Security, has mentioned the possibility of agreeing to limit, not ban, intermediate-range missiles in theater. She suggests that advances in monitoring and sensors in the decades since the U.S. and Soviet Union concluded the INF Treaty may strengthen the arguments for agreeing to limits.⁷⁰ Still, Gray would caution that authoritarian countries have proven over time they cannot be trusted to adhere to arms control agreements. Germany, Japan, and Italy cheated on arms agreements in the interwar period and the Soviet Union cheated during the Cold War. As Gray underscored, compliance and safeguards have so far proven of limited efficacy.⁷¹

If the Biden Administration chooses to push for a confidence-building dialogue, a number of lighter potential dialogue components could be assembled. On a crawl-before-you-walk level, Perkovich has suggested discussions around the potential for the Law of Armed Conflict to be applied to regional nuclear arsenals and doctrine.⁷² Brad Roberts suggests as a potentially overlapping move to significantly broaden dialogue among the five Nuclear Proliferation Treaty-recognized powers, the U.S., UK, France, Russia, and China.⁷³

Scholarship offers differing views as to whether there yet exists an "epistemic community" across the U.S. and China, i.e., a gathering of nuclear experts who communicate with sufficient frequency and measured candor so as to share perspectives and a measure of nuclear arms "logic," in a manner resembling the U.S.-Soviet Cold War "nuclear priesthood." A few Chinese analysts have engaged with the U.S. in this fashion, including Tong Zhao, who has urged in favor of expanding such meetings.⁷⁴ Furthering such an epistemic community through additional expert-, academic, and mid-level dialogues could be a worthwhile U.S. effort, as an

adjunct to negotiations and to bring Chinese analysts into more of a shared understanding with western counterparts. Perkovich and Vaddi note the benefits from improved dialogue,

highlighting

the absence of meaningful sustained dialogue between senior U.S. and Chinese defense officials and military officers regarding issues related to nuclear and missile defense policies impairs both countries' capacity to avoid conflict or to prevent any potential conflict from escalating. Chinese leaders—especially the top officials of the PLA (People's Liberation Army) Rocket Force—traditionally have been averse to engaging transparently in such dialogue, even though they may be able to represent Beijing's genuine strategic perspectives.⁷⁵

Weightier topics could be on the far horizon for discussion but would take longer preparation and discernment before negotiations. For instance, like Russia, China asserts it is concerned over U.S. missile defense; Chinese analyst Tong Zhao has proposed discussing the issue.⁷⁶ Note, however, that both Russia and China have robust missile defense capabilities of their own.

Perkovich and Vaddi propose that bilateral discussions with China work to increase stability by focusing on bilateral or regional limits on missiles with ranges over 500 kilometers; setting limits on regional missile defenses; and evaluating together the risks of cyber operations against nuclear weapon command and control elements.⁷⁷

China's increasing concern over Russia's arsenal could in time be useful grist for substantive discussion or to push movement toward negotiations. In its 2019 Defense White Paper China noted Russian nuclear arms modernization as a concern, an issue unmentioned in the previous 2015 release.⁷⁸ The space and cyber domains have also been noted as potential fruitful areas of discussion by Robert Wood, the U.S. Ambassador to the Conference on Disarmament,⁷⁹ and by China's Tong Zhao.⁸⁰

THE IMPACT OF CHINESE NEGOTIATING PRACTICES AND STYLES

As the U.S. discerns what is attainable in strategic arms negotiations with China and whether arms control in this instance would bear fruit, one must also review the long history of misunderstandings in U.S.-China negotiations, protracted negotiating processes, and allegations of bad faith after the fact by negotiators on both sides. In common with many non-Western cultures, but to a stronger degree, Chinese negotiating practices and styles have long presented Western partners with an odd playing field, new and unwritten rules, and the sense the game may already have been won or lost before it has even begun. As one expert wrote over fifty years ago, surveying U.S.-China bilateral discussions starting in 1955 on repatriation of nationals following the Korean War and the early 1960s Geneva conference on Laos,

for over one hundred years, Western diplomats in China have despaired of what they described as procrastination, stubbornness, indirection, self-righteousness, unpredictability--or "Oriental inscrutability"--leisureliness, and "personalization" of diplomacy...⁸¹

Scholars in the decades since have better defined these traits and more accurately characterized them. In the earliest, pre-negotiation stages, in addition to pursuing discernment of its own goals and objectives, a Western counterparty to a negotiation with China must budget for more time and discussions to prepare. Discussions toward an agenda are typically protracted and put the foreign party at an inherent disadvantage as the beseeching party, both for the effect in public relations and for psychological use during actual negotiations. As Dan Harris wrote, the Western "suplicants" are "visitors from afar, and their hosts call the tune on the procedures and timing of the meetings."⁸²

This "home court advantage,"⁸³ in the words of Lucian Pye, has been one of China's critical advantages. It is only surpassed by China's unique, "principles-based" approach to

negotiations that Western counterparts have frequently misunderstood. While Western parties have a cultural predisposition to see contracts as legal, empirical, details-oriented agreements, Chinese negotiators frequently characterize their approach as rooted in principles, often grounded in ethical and moralistic arguments. Such principles are not "mere rhetoric," as many U.S. representatives have taken them,⁸⁴ but instead mark Chinese limits to the negotiation and often demarcate China's goals. Following from China's focus on "principles," Pye emphasizes that

whereas Americans tend to concentrate on trying to figure out what each side is prepared to give up and what each needs to get in order to arrive at an agreement, the Chinese seek agreement in terms of discovering common ground where the interests are truly parallel... for the Chinese, the idea of compromise clashes with the importance of adhering to principles.⁸⁵

Pye continues by urging using the pre-negotiation process and the negotiation itself to collect information, just as China does.

Once in the formal negotiations, not only does information-gathering continue, but China continues to work toward principles, uses delays as a negotiating tactic, and typically seeks to isolate its least-desired members of the counterparty negotiating team, as Richard Solomon and other experts note.⁸⁶ Counterparties are also urged to study, consult, and maintain a comprehensive record of the negotiations as Chinese negotiators frequently reference past understandings, at times inaccurately.⁸⁷

Moving closer to the seeming end of the negotiation, Chinese and U.S. experts on past U.S.-Chinese business interactions emphasize that Chinese negotiators

make concessions on low-priority issues and infer that issues on which the counterpart makes concessions are also low priority. On high-priority issues, however, they hold firm and expect their counterparts to do the same... In planning counteroffers, Western negotiators should hold firm on high-priority issues and signal flexibility on low-priority issues... Their general rule is: To the extent possible, concede on low-priority issues and remain firm on high-priority issues.⁸⁸

The end of discussions can come sooner than Western negotiators expect, or may not come at all. Harris and Pye caution that early agreement on principles can net a faster rush to consensus than expected. China may also end or threaten to end on a negative note, a circumstance they know Western negotiators find culturally uncomfortable.⁸⁹ China may also draw out negotiations to gain further benefits. At the same time, China's goal may not be intrinsic to the negotiation, but rather, an intensified relationship or goals seemingly external to the negotiation.⁹⁰

The PRC used protracted negotiations in precisely this fashion, for seemingly extrinsic goals, in its first major diplomatic engagement with the United States starting in 1955. As described by former U.S. Ambassador Kenneth Young, the 1955-1970 U.S.-China Ambassadorial meetings saw the Chinese hold for years the few remaining Americans in country, as *de facto* negotiation hostages. Despite agreeing on paper to let U.S. nationals leave, China delayed the actual departures in an unsuccessful attempt to push discussions and agreement toward its priority issues of Taiwan and potential U.S. recognition of the P.R.C.⁹¹

In a reminder of the continuing importance of "principles" to P.R.C. negotiators, these critical items of Taiwan and P.R.C. recognition remained the same essential notes the United States implicitly decided not to attempt to change during the 1970s Kissinger- and Carter-eras of negotiations. As Raymond Cohen notes, "under the circumstances Washington did not challenge the principles directly, probably correctly viewing any such effort as an exercise in futility, but sought to modify them to suit the special relationship between the United States and Taiwan after normalization."⁹² The P.R.C. does not pursue "principles-based" negotiations in every situation; as Cohen highlights, U.S.-China textile trade negotiations in 1983 followed predictable patterns of prices, quantities, bidding, and compromises, in forms very familiar to western observers.⁹³

But major negotiated items, such as nuclear arms, would tend to be handled by China through the "principles" approach.

Cohen explains that the "principles" approach has forced "Sino-American relations [to develop] special instruments of diplomacy, [expressing] forms of understanding not usually thought to possess the solemn, binding nature of the international treaty." The foremost examples are the 1972 Shanghai Communique, the 1978 parallel U.S. and China statements normalizing relations, and 1985's Nuclear Cooperation Agreement.⁹⁴

Closely tied to the "principles" approach is the role of China's integrated negotiating bureaucracy. Cohen notes that Kissinger in the 1970s found "each remark by a Chinese official... part of a purposeful overall design."⁹⁵ An added caution for contemporary U.S. negotiators is that China's bureaucracy has become more empowered since the 1970s. Solomon notes that as Chinese institutions of government have been "rebuilt... the policymaking process and the mechanics of the U.S.-P.R.C. relationship have become increasingly bureaucratic."⁹⁶

In sum, bilateral U.S.-China negotiations or discussions on arms control will be strongly influenced by a Chinese negotiating style at variance with U.S. experience of an empirical, compromise-focused interaction. China's use of delay, home-court advantage, and other culturally-tied negotiating characteristics are factors U.S. negotiators can prepare for and work to neutralize. But China's unique emphasis on principles-based outcomes has potential to radically reframe both the process and the negotiated outcome. As U.S. policymakers undertake a review or discernment of preferred outcomes from a negotiation, they should be open to the range of possibilities a joint U.S.-China agreement on principles could bring, in contrast to a quantitatively-focused agreement along the lines of SALT, START, or the INF Treaty. Given

the significant U.S.-China nuclear warhead disparity, an agreement focusing on principles and behaviors may be optimum for the U.S. as well as for China.

CONCLUSIONS

Experience strongly suggests arms control negotiations are not sufficient in themselves to manage the challenge of deterrence, or the dilemmas of conventional-nuclear integration (CNI) and risk of unintended conventional or nuclear conflict. Put another way, deterrence must continue even in the presence of a functioning arms control agreement. Such problems as deterrence, CNI, and the risk of unintended conflict have to date never been negotiated away.

The lessons of the Cold War and the deterioration of arms control agreements with Russia under Vladimir Putin all call for caution. As the Biden Administration weighs whether to pursue strategic arms control negotiations with China, it must weigh force modernization, continued budgeting to pay for modernization, and the risk that negotiated arms control in one sector may shade sentiment in the U.S. to prematurely cut defense spending focused on countering China.

For the United States, arms control in the current environment may be best pursued as a tool to defuse diplomatic pressure among U.S. allies and partners, help to develop allied confidence and dialogue, and air and explore the concerns of both the U.S. and China. The first U.S. diplomatic advance work must be with allies and partners, and within the U.S. domestic discussion and analysis, to assess and discern goals with regard to China as a strategic competitor and economic actor. The U.S. process of discernment should start with a review of obtainable,

top-level goals with regard to China and an estimate of China's uppermost political goals, which for decades have consistently highlighted Taiwan as a focal point.

After U.S. discernment, alone and with allies, the U.S. would be equipped and open to a period of joint discernment with China. In that process the U.S. might learn additional vulnerabilities and goals from China's point of view. (One potential source of leverage might be Russia's aggressive nuclear modernization program, over which China noted discomfort in its 2019 defense white paper. In this and other areas, well-planned bilateral discussions, without a deadline or pressure for an agreement, may assist the U.S. in finding additional pressure points.)

If the Administration ultimately chooses to pursue strategic arms control with China, it must determine how arms control fits in a broader set of needs in the relationship, including strategic economic cooperation and sensitive sectors, simple commodity and more complicated economic and technological strains, and China's new, intensively aggressive stance toward U.S. partners, including Australia, New Zealand, and India. Whatever is potentially nettable from an arms control relationship will likely have to be summarizable in terms of principles, whether of conduct or transparency or intentions. A traditionally comprehensive, quantities- and compromise-focused negotiation is unlikely.

The Administration may well judge the U.S.-China power relationship in the western Pacific is not stable or strong enough to support a durable arms control relationship at this time. Still, the Administration could, in the name of arms control, pursue a discussion on confidence-building measures -- a discussion that could in itself help raise confidence and increase understanding on both sides. In such a discussion, small-bore explorations of transparency and reconnaissance, rules of engagement, space and cyber policy, reducing the risk of accidental conflict, and engagement among the "nuclear priesthood," would all have the effect of building a better

understanding on both sides and laying groundwork should the broader relationship begin to permit a more substantive agreement.

TABLES AND FIGURES

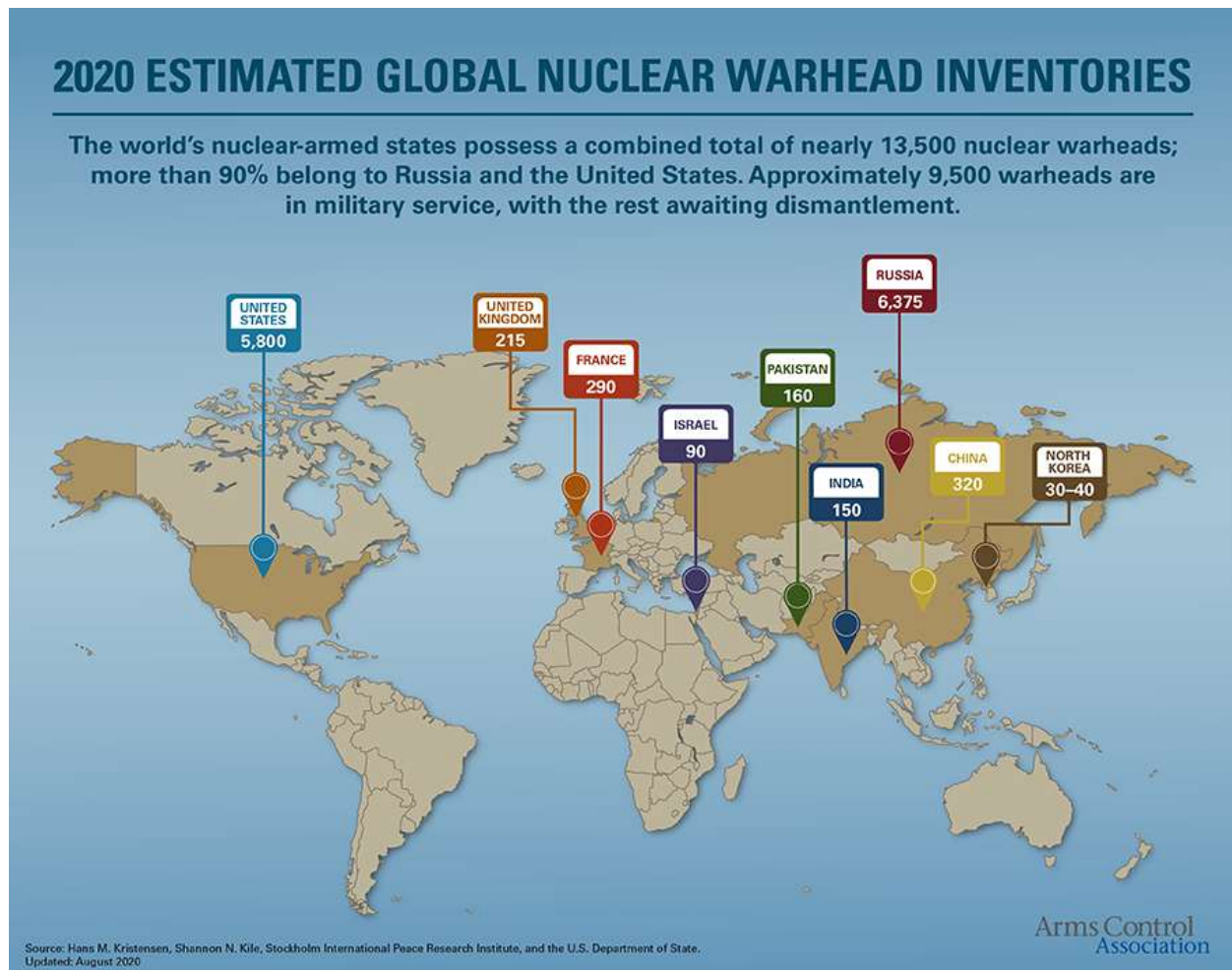


Figure 1: Global Nuclear Warhead Inventories

Source: Kelsey Davenport, Kingston Reif, and Daryl G. Kimball, "Nuclear Weapons: Who Has What at a Glance," *Arms Control Association*, August 2020, <https://www.armscontrol.org/factsheets/Nuclearweaponswhohaswhat>

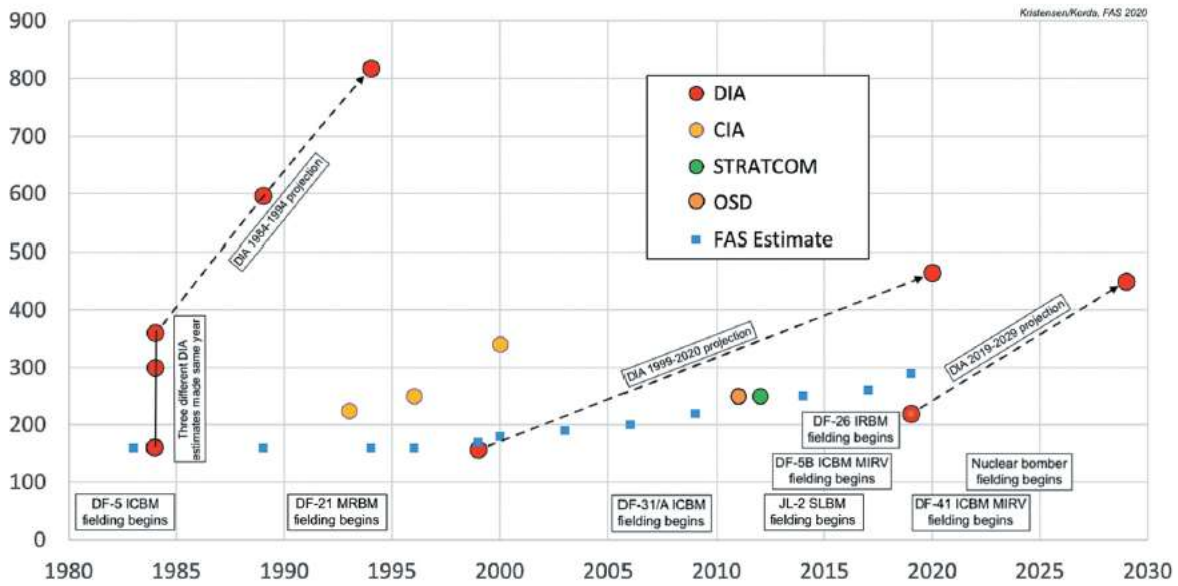


Figure 2: U.S. Organizations' Estimates of China's Nuclear Warhead Stockpile

Source: Hans M. Kristensen and Matt Korda, "Chinese Nuclear Forces, 2020," *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* 76, no. 6, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00963402.2020.1846432>

DOD Estimates For China's Rocket Forces

China's Rocket Force 2019

<i>System</i>	<i>Launchers</i>	<i>Missiles</i>	<i>Estimated Range</i>
ICBM	90	90	>5,500km
IRBM	80	80-160	3,000-5,500km
MRBM	150	150-450	1,000-3,000km
SRBM	250	750-1500	300-1,000km
GLCM	90	270-540	>1,500km

China's Rocket Force 2018

<i>System</i>	<i>Launchers</i>	<i>Missiles</i>	<i>Estimated Range</i>
ICBM	50-75	75-100	5,400-13,000+ km
IRBM	16-30	16-30	3,000+ km
MRBM	100-125	200-300	1,500+ km
SRBM	250-300	1,000-1,200	300-1,000 km
GLCM	40-55	200-300	1,500+ km

Source: DOD annual report on Chinese military developments, 2018 and 2019

Annotations: Kristensen/Korda, FAS 2019

Table 1: U.S. DOD Estimates of China's Missile Stockpile

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