

Report

Rebuilding Bilateral Consensus: Assessing U.S.-China Arms Control and Nonproliferation Achievements

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Shortly after normalization and beginning in the early 1980s, arms control became a small but increasingly important part of U.S.-China security relations. Officials from Washington and Beijing began to discuss a variety of arms control and nonproliferation issues in both multilateral and bilateral settings.¹ Since then, Washington and Beijing have engaged in extensive dialogues, long drawn-out negotiations, and private consultations. These formal talks have been complemented by a growing number of contacts between academic arms control and security specialists from both sides of the Pacific. As a result of these two tracks, the arms control and nonproliferation agendas of Washington and Beijing have, in broad terms, gradually converged in the last two decades. China's growing participation in international treaties and agreements as well as the expanding coterie of arms control specialists in China is a testament to these trends.

However, in recent years this nascent bilateral convergence on arms control and nonproliferation has begun to fade. The United States and China now confront

three key challenges. First, the United States and China are in the process of gradually rebuilding their arms control and nonproliferation dialogue after a hiatus of over 16 months. Following the accidental North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) bombing of the Chinese Embassy in Belgrade, Beijing cancelled virtually all bilateral nonproliferation dialogues until July 2000. As a result, the bilateral arms control and nonproliferation agenda is packed with the hard issues that have been left lingering over the last two years. A second challenge is the acute bilateral differences over U.S. national and theater missile defense (NMD and TMD) policies. NMD and TMD are the central security-related disputes between the United States and China and raise profound questions about the future evolution of bilateral strategic relations.

A third challenge for Washington and Beijing is to leverage past arms control progress in an effort to manage continuing disputes while fostering increased bilateral policy convergence in the future. The United States and China share some core assumptions about arms con-

trol and nonproliferation that can serve as a foundation for regular and institutionalized discussions that are immune to major down-turns in relations.

To reenergize their discussions, both the United States and China need to recognize the past bilateral successes in arms control and nonproliferation. These achievements come in two broad varieties: (1) expanding the quantity and quality of cooperation across the full range of arms control and nonproliferation issues, and (2) deepening the United States and the Chinese understanding of each other's policies and decisionmaking structures. From the vantage point of 2000, much has been accomplished even though serious issues still need to be addressed.

To elucidate these positive trends, this report addresses two main questions: (1) what were the most significant bilateral arms control and nonproliferation achievements in the last 20 years, and (2) what factors explain the gradual convergence in national agendas. Reviewing achievements presents a thorny methodological issue, however, because assessing achievements is a matter of degree and depends on criteria. This report maintains that, based on *either* the U.S. criteria or Chinese standards, the changes that have taken place are significant both in terms of their formal content and in terms of enhancing the quality of bilateral dialogues on international security topics. While the U.S. and Chinese assessments likely differ regarding the depth and speed of the accomplishments, their content is based on empirical fact. Perhaps most importantly, the convergence in policy agendas has required adjustment and compromise from both countries.

The first part of this report categorizes and assesses the arms control and nonproliferation achievements in Sino-U.S. relations. The second section suggests a variety of factors facilitating such cooperation while a third part highlights continuing problems in the execution of U.S.-China arms control and nonproliferation dialogues. The conclusion seeks to put these past achievements and current difficulties in the context of the future of Sino-U.S. security relations.

U.S.-CHINA ARMS CONTROL AND NONPROLIFERATION ACHIEVEMENTS

Bilateral arms control and nonproliferation achievements in the last 20 years come in a number of varieties: global, regional, and bilateral. The United States and

China have cooperated to buttress the global arms control agenda, address regional proliferation threats, and resolve lingering bilateral differences over nonproliferation policy. The convergence on these issues testifies to the improved quality of the dialogue between Washington and Beijing.

Multilateral Arms Control and Nonproliferation Achievements

Sino-U.S. cooperation on *multilateral* arms control and nonproliferation represents perhaps the most extensive area of policy convergence. First, both countries made efforts to support the indefinite and unconditional extension of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) at the United Nations in 1995. The U.S. and Chinese strategies were complementary in many ways. The United States assumed a highly public profile to promote the indefinite and unconditional extension of the treaty. Traveling to countries all over the world, United States diplomats argued that the NPT, despite its weaknesses and drawbacks, served the national security needs of all its members and only indefinite and unconditional extension would ensure the continuity of the treaty's security-enhancing benefits.² In contrast to the high-profile American approach, China worked from behind the scenes. Initially, China advocated the "smooth" extension of the treaty, an ambiguous formulation which maximized Beijing's negotiating room. Leveraging China's position as both a P-5 nuclear power and a developing country, Chinese diplomats ultimately sought to consolidate support within non-aligned nations for the indefinite extension of the NPT. Sino-U.S. cooperation on multilateral NPT issues yielded additional fruits at the recent 2000 NPT Review Conference. Before the negotiations began and *in spite of the freeze on bilateral nonproliferation dialogues*, U.S. and Chinese policymakers met in Beijing to forge strategies for achieving success at the conference.³ These consultations subsequently proved successful when, for the first time since 1985, the conference produced a consensus final document outlining future challenges for NPT parties.

The completion and signature of the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) in 1996 represents a second multilateral arms control achievement for the United States and China. At the beginning of the CTBT talks in 1994, the positions of the United States and China differed on several key issues and appeared irrec-

oncilable. These differences included: the scope of the treaty, an exception for peaceful nuclear explosions (PNEs), and verification issues related to the use of national technical means and the acceptability of on-site inspections (OSI). Despite their differing positions, the United States and China, in conjunction with other nations, gradually narrowed their differences. China dropped its insistence on the inclusion of PNEs and its objection to OSI (while noting its concerns about the implications of OSI for national sovereignty). During the end-stage of the CTBT negotiations, Sino-U.S. bargaining reached its peak with *exclusive* bilateral consultations concerning the OSI trigger mechanism. The United States wanted a “red light” procedure whereas China wanted a “green light” one.⁴ Drawing on a Chinese compromise formula, the United States and China finally agreed on a “green light” procedure requiring 30 votes. U.S. officials viewed China’s serious and detailed efforts to resolve this deadlock as an indication of the positive contributions China can make to global arms control efforts.⁵

Third, similar to the experience of the CTBT, Sino-U.S. cooperation during the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) negotiations resulted from a common recognition of the danger of chemical weapons and a consensus on the importance of strengthening the international norms against their use, sale, or production. During CWC talks in the 1980s and early 1990s, the United States and China gradually narrowed their policy differences, especially those related to verification issues. Both the United States and China ratified the treaty early enough to be designated as founding members of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) as well as members of the OPCW’s Executive Council. Since then, both the United States and China have made efforts to comply with their CWC commitments. In particular, China made extensive efforts to comply with its CWC obligations related to domestic chemical production. China has submitted both the initial *and* annual declarations to the OPCW. China has also already permitted over a dozen inspections, and in 1997 and 1998 assisted the OPCW with two training courses for inspectors.⁶ More importantly, China has afforded high-level political support to the CWC with the appointment of a vice-premier as director of China’s Office of CWC Implementation. U.S. implementation, by contrast, has been delayed and complicated by congressional

maneuvering to modify some of the treaty’s original requirements.

Regional Arms Control and Nonproliferation Cooperation

Sino-U.S. regional nonproliferation cooperation occurred on two issues: North Korea and South Asia. First, in the case of North Korea’s nuclear and missile program, U.S. officials have engaged in high-stakes negotiating with Pyongyang while Chinese diplomats have relied on private diplomacy. The U.S. nonproliferation strategy to deal with North Korea relies on two central pillars: the 1994 Agreed Framework and bilateral missile nonproliferation dialogues. The first proved successful in freezing North Korea’s plutonium production capabilities, storing spent nuclear fuel, and committing North Korea to the eventual rollback of its nuclear program. The second component has achieved a freeze in further missile launches. New proposals for a permanent freeze are currently being explored. In parallel with the U.S. efforts, Chinese diplomats have sought to persuade North Korea of the dangers associated with nuclear weapon development and continued missile testing. Some of North Korea’s recently self-imposed restrictions on missile testing are likely a partial result of Chinese intervention.⁷

Second, following the nuclear tests by Pakistan and India in 1998, the United States and Chinese responses reflected a mutual recognition of the dangers of overt vertical proliferation and weaponization in South Asia. In early June 1998, the United States and China jointly initiated the drafting of United Nations Security Council (UNSC) Resolution 1172; this resolution condemned the tests and called for both India and Pakistan to halt further testing and weaponization, abandon their nuclear programs, and join both the NPT and CTBT.⁸ This coordination was qualitatively superior to that on North Korean issues because the security interests of Beijing and Washington not only coincided but both governments actually worked together to respond to the tests. These efforts were quickly followed by the issuance of a Sino-U.S. Joint Statement on South Asia during the 1998 Clinton-Jiang summit in China. This Joint Statement widened the scope of the nonproliferation commitments of both the United States and China in South Asia. In particular, the Joint Statement nominally improved China’s missile nonproliferation policies; it committed both nations “to prevent the export of equipment, mate-

rials or technology that could in any way assist programs in India or Pakistan for nuclear weapons or for ballistic missiles capable of delivering such weapons, and that to this end, we will strengthen our national export control systems.”⁹

To be sure, in 1999 both Washington and Beijing moved away from many of the mandates of resolution 1172, including the political and economic sanctions called for in the document. Yet, even these policy shifts occurred in tandem. The United States first broke with resolution 1172 in late 1998 when the State Department began to engage India in a bilateral nonproliferation dialogue. The Chinese initially opposed this move as legitimizing India’s nuclear program, but several months later Beijing grudgingly adopted a similar approach. In 2000 alone, China restarted the border talks with India, initiated a security dialogue, and hosted a visit of India’s president.¹⁰ In contrast to the close Sino-U.S. cooperation on resolution 1172, this latter evolution of Chinese and U.S. approaches to nonproliferation in South Asia does not quite constitute formal coordination but rather amounts to similar policies adopted in parallel (although not simultaneously) based on a mutual recognition of the impracticality of pursuing nonproliferation in South Asia through isolation and coercion.

Bilateral Arms Control and Nonproliferation Successes

In contrast to Sino-U.S. cooperation on multilateral and regional arms control and nonproliferation issues, bilateral negotiations have been far more controversial and contentious. From the perspectives of both Beijing and Washington, this road has been bumpy with progress occurring in fits and starts. The United States has imposed sanctions on China three times for proliferation activities,¹¹ and related difficulties have led to serious disruptions in bilateral ties. Despite these problems, substantial progress has been achieved as national nonproliferation policies have gradually converged in recent years. In general terms, one of the greatest achievements has been the enhanced level of mutual understanding of the constraints and barriers affecting each other’s nonproliferation policies. Bilateral achievements have occurred in three main areas.

First, U.S. and Chinese nuclear nonproliferation policies have converged to such a degree that disputes over this issue no longer occupy a central place in the bilat-

eral dialogues. China joined the NPT in 1992, clarified its NPT commitment in May 1996, and then in 1997 adopted a series of nuclear export control laws that mirror international standards. In 1997, China also joined the Zangger Committee and then committed during the 1997 Clinton-Jiang summit to ban all further nuclear cooperation with Iran, a pledge that goes beyond existing international nonproliferation standards. In 1998, China, as promised, adopted an additional law covering dual-use nuclear exports. In exchange for many of the recent policy shifts, the United States agreed to implement the long-dormant U.S.-China Nuclear Cooperation Agreement (NCA) which facilitates nuclear commerce between the United States and China.¹² Sino-U.S. cooperation on nuclear nonproliferation was further advanced in early 1998 when the United States quietly raised concerns about illicit exports of nuclear-related chemical goods to Iran; Chinese officials investigated and responded by canceling the deal.¹³

In addition, the United States and China have also reached other confidence-building agreements related to arms control. In the mid-1990s, U.S. and Chinese nuclear laboratories established the lab-to-lab exchange program for scientists from both countries to discuss a variety of nonproliferation-related issues, including the scientific community’s role in export control decisionmaking.¹⁴ In other areas, Presidents Clinton and Jiang agreed in June 1998 not to target their nuclear weapons at each other, as part of their effort to inject a modicum of trust into Sino-U.S. security dialogues.

Even in areas of deep dispute, such as missile nonproliferation, some progress has been achieved. In contrast to nuclear proliferation and chemical weapons issues, missile nonproliferation has been dealt with on an exclusively bilateral level. Since the late 1980s, the United States and China have resolved a number of disagreements concerning Chinese missile exports and China’s participation in the Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR). China has provided a string of commitments that have curbed some of China’s export activities and incrementally signaled an apparent recognition of the dangers posed by missile proliferation. Beginning in 1988, Chinese leaders agreed not to export medium-range missiles similar to the DF-3 sold to Saudi Arabia. In the early 1990s, China agreed to adhere to the original MTCR guidelines and parameters (not the annex) and then further clarified the scope of its commitments in 1994 when it agreed to ban all ex-

ports of MTCR-class missiles. In October 1997 during the Clinton-Jiang summit, Chinese leaders went beyond previous MTCR commitments and unilaterally promised not to export C-801 and C-802 cruise missiles to Iran. Most recently, in November 2000, China agreed to issue, at a unspecified future date, export controls laws which are supposed to mirror MTCR restrictions.¹⁵

The above argument is not meant—in any way—to minimize the importance of the current disagreements regarding Chinese missile technology exports and its suspect missile sales practices. China remains outside the MTCR and interprets its adherence to the regime very narrowly. Chinese “entities” continue to export technology and equipment to missile programs in Pakistan and Iran that contribute to their offensive and defensive military activities. Some reports suggest that Chinese companies are also providing North Korean firms with raw materials used to modernize its ballistic missiles.¹⁶ Indeed, the prospect of future progress on this issue is slim; China now implicitly links its position on the MTCR to U.S. plans to provide TMD to Taiwan.

Informal Bilateral Interactions

In addition to the formal bilateral channels, an increasing variety of unofficial academic exchanges over the last 20 years have enhanced the quality of bilateral arms control and nonproliferation dialogues. These interactions have helped to facilitate the development of China’s arms control and nonproliferation communities. Beginning in the early 1980s, Stanford University’s Center for International Security and Arms Control (CISAC)¹⁷ hosted a number of scholars from Chinese foreign ministry and military research institutes to introduce them to arms control. CISAC’s program laid the foundation for the emergence of an epistemic arms control community in China. These efforts were complemented by similar programs at Princeton University and the Union of Concerned Scientists in the later part of the 1980s and early 1990s. Through fellowships and bilateral conferences, these U.S. institutions sought to introduce China’s *scientific* and *military-technical* communities to global arms control and nonproliferation topics, especially missile defenses. These exchange programs were crucial to fostering China’s first international arms control conference in 1988 sponsored by the Institute of Applied Physics and Computational Mathematics (IAPCM) and ISODARCO, an Italian disarmament organization. They also had the multiplier effect of training Chinese schol-

ars who went on to establish arms control research programs at Chinese institutions such as Fudan University, Beijing University, and a variety of government think-tanks. Students from these university programs have recently begun to enter government circles as well. In the later part of the 1990s, U.S. institutions such as the Center for Nonproliferation Studies (Monterey Institute of International Studies) and the Stimson Center have been helping to facilitate the *professionalization* of China’s arms control community by training the “second-generation” of young diplomats, military officials, and policy analysts from a variety of government ministries and organizations in the intricacies of arms control and nonproliferation.

FACTORS INFLUENCING U.S.-CHINA ARMS CONTROL AND NONPROLIFERATION COOPERATION

A number of factors and trends operating at three levels of analysis—international, bilateral, and domestic—fostered and influenced the Sino-U.S. cooperation identified above. These trends, occurring at different times and to differing degrees, collectively created the circumstances under which Sino-U.S. arms control and nonproliferation cooperation became increasingly possible.

International Trends

Three types of international factors facilitated the convergence of the U.S. and Chinese arms control and nonproliferation agendas over the last 20 years.

Beginning in the late 1980s, positive trends in international arms control affairs have augmented Beijing’s interest in nonproliferation. For example, the debate in China in the late 1980s concerning membership in the NPT was strongly influenced by two international trends. The U.S.-Soviet nuclear competition had begun to change in a way that had lessened Beijing’s principled objections to joining the NPT.¹⁸ For decades, Chinese officials maintained that addressing vertical proliferation was prior to and fundamentally more important than confronting horizontal proliferation. In the late 1980s, the United States and the Soviet Union had begun to achieve significant progress in arms control; this signaled to Chinese officials that the superpower arms race might be coming to an end. This trend created an environment that many Chinese experts felt was conducive to join-

ing the NPT. Indeed, this lessening of the superpower arms race was an especially important factor in the military's support for NPT membership.¹⁹

In addition, the growing support for the norm of nuclear nonproliferation among developing countries combined with the expanding membership in the NPT further convinced Chinese officials of the importance of treaty membership. For decades, China viewed the NPT as discriminating against the interests of developing countries. As the objections of developing countries to the NPT lessened, Chinese leaders became more willing to consider joining the NPT. These two changes in the international environment created the necessary (and possibly sufficient) conditions for China to join the NPT. By early 1990, Chinese officials had decided to participate, for the first time, in the NPT review conference in New York. A year later Chinese officials announced their decision to formally sign the treaty.²⁰

Second, global momentum and international public opinion in favor of various arms control agreements contributed to bilateral cooperation. The case of the CTBT is instructive in this regard. By most accounts, when the CTBT negotiations began in 1994, China joined them reluctantly. China was in the middle of its first major missile and nuclear modernization program and at that time had conducted far fewer nuclear tests than any other country. In previous years, Chinese diplomats had made efforts to forestall test ban negotiations in Geneva. Chinese participation in the CTBT meant that, for the first time, China would adopt real constraints on its military capabilities. Yet, by 1993 and 1994, the international pressure for China to join the CTBT and to stop all testing was strong and growing. Central Asian nations protested China's continued testing based on environmental concerns, and Japan suspended loan aid on similar grounds. During CTBT negotiations, international momentum against various Chinese negotiating positions had a similar constraining effect as indicated in the previous section.²¹

Changing global threat perceptions represent a third trend which has directly influenced the character of Sino-U.S. nonproliferation discussions. The growing international concern about nuclear and missile proliferation in the early 1990s shifted U.S. national security priorities toward addressing these emerging threats. Iraq's use of missiles combined with the post Gulf-War discovery of the extensive nature of Iraq's secret WMD programs

dramatically raised the salience of international nonproliferation efforts. During the Cold War, nonproliferation often assumed a back seat to the high-profile U.S.-Soviet nuclear arms control negotiations. In the aftermath of the Gulf War and the emergence of North Korea's secret nuclear weapon efforts, the international community began to pay greater attention to the risks of nuclear, chemical, biological and missile proliferation. It was in the context of these concerns that the United States and China began to discuss Chinese participation in global nonproliferation accords, especially the MTCR. U.S. policymakers were no longer willing to overlook Chinese proliferation activities for the sake of the Sino-U.S. strategic relations.

Bilateral Trends

On the bilateral level, three trends are apparent. First, U.S. and Chinese nonproliferation cooperation resulted from the convergence of security interests and security concerns. The cases of North Korea and South Asia are most instructive. Concerns about nuclear proliferation on the Korean peninsula and the prospect of war resonated in Beijing as well as in Washington.²² In particular, the fear in 1994 that North Korean intransigence about allowing international inspections could lead to a war prompted private Chinese intervention. Chinese officials may have provided similar assistance in persuading the North to accept constraints on its missile testing program.²³ Chinese officials are painfully aware that North Korean missile tests indirectly compromise Chinese security interests by bolstering U.S. and Japanese support for national and theater missile defenses.

The 1998 nuclear tests by India and Pakistan threatened both U.S. and Chinese security interests. For years, U.S. officials and scholars have consistently viewed South Asia as the most likely theater for the outbreak of a nuclear war. From China's perspective, India's nuclear tests were meant to verify new, smaller warheads for deployment on India's longer range missiles capable of targeting major population centers in China. Indian officials stated before and after the tests that their nuclear modernization is directed at a perceived threat from China.²⁴ In addition, India's enhanced nuclear capabilities qualitatively augmented the threat to Pakistan, China's long-time quasi-ally, and put pressure on China to increase its military assistance to Islamabad.

Second, arms control and nonproliferation achievements have resulted from hard bargaining and trade-offs by Washington and Beijing. The anticipation of incentives and/or sanctions has played a particularly important role, especially from China's perspective. In the 1980s, China issued its first nuclear nonproliferation commitments during the negotiation of the U.S.-China NCA, and later that decade Beijing agreed not to export intermediate-range ballistic missiles in exchange for U.S. offers to launch American-made satellites on Chinese rockets. Beijing provided missile nonproliferation commitments in 1991, 1994, and 2000 following the U.S. imposition or threat of sanctions in 1991, 1993, and 2000. Yet as the policy differences between the United States and China have narrowed and the nature of the nonproliferation disputes has changed, the credibility and effectiveness of sanctions as a nonproliferation tool have likely diminished.²⁵

Third, in recent years, U.S. and Chinese assessments of the current state and future development of bilateral relations explain recent nonproliferation and arms control achievements. The 1997 and 1998 summits provide multiple examples of mutual efforts to improve the relationship through progress on these issues. During President Jiang's trip to the United States in 1997, Chinese officials provided a variety of supra-institutional nuclear and missile nonproliferation commitments that went beyond the requirements of international nonproliferation treaties and agreements. Specifically, China's pledges included a ban on most current and all future nuclear cooperation with Iran and a promise not to export C-801 and C-802 cruise missiles to Iran.²⁶ Chinese officials gave these commitments based on expectations that the United States and China could move to a new level in their bilateral relations. For many Chinese senior leaders, the 1997 trip was imbued with enormous importance and was viewed as the "real normalization" of bilateral relations after Tiananmen. In fact, Jiang's trip was the first "state visit" of China's top leader to the U.S. since 1988 and Jiang Zemin's first. For the United States, China's nuclear nonproliferation commitments allowed for the final implementation of the long-dormant U.S.-China NCA. This accord also signaled to many in the United States that Washington and Beijing could now constructively address controversial security issues. A similar pattern of progress, albeit significantly more modest, was achieved during Clinton's trip to China in 1998. In exchange for U.S. clarification con-

cerning its Taiwan policy, Chinese leaders agreed to a detargeting accord and to "actively study" MTCR membership. Indeed, these 1998 agreements were made *despite* the opposition of senior arms controllers in China.

To be sure, the implicit and explicit linkages between bilateral relations and nonproliferation policy often function in reverse as well; deterioration in relations have frustrated and complicated bilateral nonproliferation dialogues. Chinese officials froze U.S.-China arms control and nonproliferation dialogue in the wake of the accidental U.S. bombing of the Chinese embassy in Belgrade; this occurred despite the fact that the relationship was plagued by a growing number of arms control and nonproliferation disagreements that required immediate consultations.²⁷ In addition, recent Chinese concerns about U.S. national and theater missile defense plans have apparently led to more active Chinese missile technology exports, especially in South Asia.²⁸

Domestic Trends and Sino-U.S. Arms Control and Nonproliferation Achievements

The growth and evolution of China's domestic arms control and nonproliferation community in the last 20 years have had a profound influence on China's understanding of arms control and nonproliferation issues. As the global arms control and nonproliferation agenda expanded in the wake of the Cold War, the growing number of Chinese experts has augmented the quality of security discourse in China and thus Beijing's willingness to participate in international and bilateral negotiations. China's arms control community has undergone three important trends: pluralization, institutionalization, and professionalization. Compared to 20 years ago, there are three to four times more arms control and nonproliferation experts in China in the foreign ministry, the military community, the technical community, the defense industry and Chinese academic circles²⁹; these experts interact far more frequently through both formal and informal settings; and many in the community have gained a more sophisticated view of international arms control and nonproliferation developments through exchanges with U.S. and international institutions.³⁰

One of the most pronounced trends in recent years has been the rapid expansion of China's academic/quasi-nongovernmental arms control and nonproliferation community of experts. Fudan, Qinghua, and Beijing Universities have all initiated courses on arms control

and nonproliferation studies for undergraduate and graduate students. Other research institutes such as the Institute of American Studies (China Academy of Social Sciences) and the China Institute of Contemporary International Relations (CICIR) recently established formal arms control research programs. These institutions have also begun sponsoring widely attended internal conferences that bring together academics and officials from the major institutions in China's arms control community, including reclusive military departments such as China's Second Artillery (*Dier Paobing*).³¹ (The Second Artillery is China's strategic rocket forces, responsible for management of all of China's missiles.)

In stark contrast to the positive domestic currents in China, internal political debates in the United States have had a profoundly negative influence on bilateral arms control and nonproliferation dialogues. The escalation of the "China Threat" debate in the United States combined with release of the Cox Committee Report in 1999 and the allegations of Chinese nuclear espionage poisoned the atmosphere for progress. In the wake of the Cox report, the Clinton administration halted the U.S.-China lab-to-lab program and, thus, destroyed the modicum of trust established between scientists in the traditionally closed nuclear communities in the United States and China.³² Ironically, the lab-to-lab exchange program was one of the U.S.'s best means of gathering first-hand information about the status of China's nuclear weapons infrastructure, particularly at a time of critical transition in the nuclear industry. The heightened sensitivities in the United States about China also placed implicit restrictions on U.S. negotiators who were far more reluctant to engage in pro-active diplomacy or suggest creative approaches to resolving lingering disagreements.

Most importantly, the overwhelming political support in the United States for national and theater missile defense deployments has led to a dramatic shift in Chinese views towards arms control and nonproliferation. China is far more reluctant now to participate in global arms control and nonproliferation discussions; indeed, if NMD or TMD are deployed then China may even back-track on some of its previous pledges.³³ Recent increases in China's missile technology exports to Pakistan and Iran signal Beijing's linkage of its concerns about missile defense issues (particularly TMD sales to Taiwan) with its previous nonproliferation commitments.³⁴

DIFFICULTIES RELATED TO BILATERAL ARMS CONTROL AND NONPROLIFERATION COOPERATION

Sino-U.S. interactions on arms control and nonproliferation have been plagued by patterns of behavior that have frustrated resolution of disputes and reduced the development of trust. These problems are mainly related to the execution of U.S. and Chinese diplomacy. In terms of China, one of the most consistent patterns in the last 10 years has been the constant denial of transfers despite evidence to the contrary.³⁵ The recent history of Chinese nonproliferation policy has been characterized by denials, sometimes followed by a reluctant admission of transfers and then possibly a change in Chinese policy. This pattern of behavior has been apparent in the cases of Chinese nuclear and missile exports to Algeria, Iran, and Pakistan. Irrespective of the validity or legality of these transfers, the immediate Chinese denials (followed by admissions or changes in China's policy) lessen trust among U.S. counterparts about the Chinese government's willingness to deal openly and frankly on nonproliferation topics.

In terms of U.S. diplomacy, one problematic element for the Chinese has been their view that the United States characterizes bilateral nonproliferation disputes as multilateral ones. The American view of certain nonproliferation and arms control issues as global topics, when the U.S. security interests are the predominate concern, has complicated Sino-U.S. dialogues. For example, United States diplomats argue that China should stop exporting missile technology to Iran for the sake of global nonproliferation efforts as opposed to the United States's narrow goal of containing Iranian military capabilities and preserving Persian Gulf stability. Similar to the Chinese policies noted above, the U.S. characterization of bilateral issues as multilateral or international ones is viewed in Beijing as disingenuous and preachy. This dynamic has frustrated the conduct of frank and open discussions of proliferation concerns that are in the interest of both Chinese and U.S. security.

CONCLUSION

In the past decade, the Sino-U.S. arms control and nonproliferation agendas have to a limited degree begun to converge. Both countries have expanded the breath and depth of their arms control and nonproliferation cooperation to a point that—absent major crises in

relations—bilateral dialogues appear to have become regularized and institutionalized. The United States and China have cooperatively addressed a number of disputes over contentious nonproliferation issues, such as nuclear and missile nonproliferation, while at the same time working together to address multilateral security concerns in North Korea and South Asia as well as cooperating during treaty negotiations.

These successes resulted from a variety of international, bilateral, and domestic trends and circumstances. Trends in global security affairs combined with the development of positive dynamics in bilateral relations and domestic events in the United States and China (especially the growth of the arms control community in China) collectively explain the emergence of a modicum of cooperation in Sino-U.S. arms control and nonproliferation dialogues in recent years.

Indeed, this bilateral cooperation on arms control and nonproliferation issues will play an increasingly crucial role in the future evolution of Sino-U.S. strategic relations. The differences between the United States and China on issues of “high security” are significant and likely to grow. Officials in Beijing and Washington hold contrasting views on a variety of international security topics, including U.S. military presence in East Asia, missile defenses, humanitarian intervention and sovereignty; U.S. alliances in East Asia and Europe; and military transparency.³⁶ Yet, arms control and nonproliferation have recently emerged as the one set of “high security” issues that the United States and China share some common interests and have developed a resume of achievements. This cooperation should be leveraged to forge a framework for broader bilateral security dialogues. Drawing on the model of the U.S.-Soviet experience during the Cold War, arms control and nonproliferation negotiations should be used to structure and manage broader Sino-U.S. security relations in the coming decades. In this sense, bilateral arms control and nonproliferation dialogues offer an opportunity for the United States and China to forge the respect and trust as well as the bureaucratic channels needed to address broader differences concerning foreign policy and international security affairs.

and other CD members; the most active issue at that time was the Chemical Weapons Convention. In 1982, the United States and China began negotiating a nuclear cooperation agreement (NCA), and it was in the context of these talks that the United States suggested that the Chinese implement nuclear nonproliferation controls. In 1981 and 1982, several high profile cases emerged in which Chinese government-controlled firms exported unsafeguarded nuclear materials to countries with suspected nuclear weapon programs. In 1983, during the NCA talks, China agreed to join the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and a few months later pledged support for the principle of nuclear nonproliferation for the first time.

² See Thomas Graham, “Strengthening Arms Control,” *Washington Quarterly* 23 (Spring 2000), pp. 183-196. Ambassador Graham led the U.S. effort in 1995 to indefinitely and unconditionally extend the NPT.

³ U.S. and Chinese officials, interviews with author, Beijing, spring 2000.

⁴ In the CTBT, the “green-light” procedure is one in which an OSI is not automatic and 30 members of the Executive Committee have to agree for it to go forward; a “red-light” procedure is one in which an inspection is automatic unless stopped by a vote of the Executive Committee.

⁵ For these views, see *U.S.-China Conference on Arms Control, Disarmament and Nonproliferation*, Conference Report, East Asia Nonproliferation Program, Center for Nonproliferation Studies, Monterey Institute of International Studies, September 1998.

⁶ Chinese arms control officials, conversations with author, 1998-2000.

⁷ For an official U.S. State Department acknowledgment of the assistance that China provided in checking North Korean behavior, see Robert J. Einhorn, “Nonproliferation Challenges In Asia,” speech before the Asia Society, Hong Kong, June 7, 2000. It is still unclear what precise role China has played in influencing North Korea. It is generally assumed that in 1994 China communicated to North Korea that it would no longer veto a U.N. Security Council resolution sanctioning North Korea for violating its IAEA commitments.

⁸ U.S. and Chinese arms control officials, conversations with author, 1998-2000. Also see Zou Yunhua, *Chinese Perspectives on South Asian Nuclear Tests* (Stanford: Center for International Security and Cooperation (CISAC), working paper, January 1999).

⁹ See text of *U.S.-China Presidential Joint Statement on South Asia*, Beijing, June 27, 2000. Recent Chinese statements have called into question the scope of China’s promises included in this statement. Sha Zukang has said publicly that China does not necessarily consider the M-11 missile to be nuclear-capable which would exempt it from the prohibitions included in the Clinton-Jiang joint statement on South Asia.

¹⁰ “China, India Agree to Establish Security Dialogue,” *Indian Express*, June 15, 1999, p. 1; Damon Bristow, “India and China Hold First Ever Security Talks to Strengthen Relations,” *Jane’s Intelligence Review*, April 2000, p. 3; for information on the restarting of the border talks see “Indo-China Talks Friendly,” *Inside China Today*, May 2, 1999, p. 4.

¹¹ The United States imposed sanctions in 1991 and 1993 for the export of controlled missile technologies to entities in Iran and Pakistan. The sanctions were lifted in 1992 and 1994 respectively. In 1997 the United States imposed sanctions on several Chinese companies for the export of chemical weapons-related items to Iran. In November 2000, the State Department announced that it waived sanctions on China for the export of category I and II Missile Technology Control Regime items.

¹² *Unclassified Report to Congress on the Nonproliferation Policies and Practices of the People’s Republic of China*, Report Submitted to Congress as required by Public Law 99-103.

¹³ For information on this episode, see testimony of Stanley O. Roth, Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian Affairs, before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Washington, D.C., May 14, 1998.

¹⁴ Nancy Prindle, “The U.S.-China Lab-to-Lab Technical Exchange Program,” *Nonproliferation Review* 5, (Spring-Summer 1998), pp. 111-118.

¹⁵ For a summary of these developments see *China Profiles* database operated by the East Asia Nonproliferation Program, Center for Nonproliferation Studies, Monterey Institute of International Studies, <<http://cns.miis.edu/cns/projects/eanp/fact/posconc.htm>>.

¹⁶ U.S. Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), *Unclassified Report to Congress on the Acquisition of Technology Relating to Weapons of Mass Destruction*

¹ China joined the Conference on Disarmament (CD) in the late 1970s and began negotiating a number of arms control issues with the United States

and *Advanced Conventional Munitions: 1 July to 31 December 1999*, August 9, 2000; this report responds to a congressionally directed action in Section 721 of the Intelligence Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 1997.

¹⁷ CISAC was recently renamed the Center for International Security and Cooperation.

¹⁸ Zou Yunhua, "Bukuosan Hewuqi" [The Nonproliferation of Nuclear Weapons], *Guoji Wenti Yanjiu*, Issue 4, (1990); also see Yu Zhiyong "Guanyu He Bu Kuosan Tiaoyue de Wenti" [Concerning Some Issues About the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty], *Shijie Jingji yu Zhengzhi*, No. 6 (1988). These are perhaps the two earliest articles (openly published) in China on the NPT.

¹⁹ Senior military arms control expert, interview with author, Beijing, May 2000.

²⁰ China's post-Tiananmen, anti-isolation strategy played a very limited role in China's decision to join the NPT; rather this factor likely accounted for the timing of China's decision, but little more than that. The debate in China about joining the NPT had begun well before 1989, and the 1990 decision to participate in the NPT review conference was a clear indication that the Chinese had virtually decided to sign the treaty; this pattern of behavior is similar to China's membership in the Conference on Disarmament in the late 1970s. China announced its membership in the NPT during the August 1991 visit of Japan's prime minister to China, the first visit of a G-7 country following the Tiananmen incident. Before the visit, Japan had made nonproliferation a central element of its bilateral relations with China. Thus, the timing of the NPT decision can be seen as a tactical gesture to win favor with Japan during a difficult time for China's foreign relations.

²¹ For a comprehensive assessment of the CTBT negotiations including the U.S. and Chinese positions during the talks, see Rebecca Johnson, *A Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty: Signed but not Sealed, a review of the CTBT Negotiations in the Conference on Disarmament: January - September 1996*, ACRONYM Report No. 10 (May 1997); Rebecca Johnson, *Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty: The Endgame a review of the CTBT Negotiations in the Conference on Disarmament January - March 1996*, ACRONYM Report No. 9 (April 1996).

²² For mainstream Chinese views on the threats posed by nuclear proliferation in Korea, see Cheng Yujie, "Chaoxian He Wenti de Lailong Qumai" [The Origins and Development of the Korean Nuclear Issue], *Xiandai Guoji Guanxi* 9 (1994), pp. 43-47.

²³ Chinese arms control officials, conversations with author, 1998-2000; also see Robert J. Einhorn, "Nonproliferation Challenges In Asia," speech before the Asia Society, Hong Kong, June 7, 2000.

²⁴ A few days prior to India's test the then-Indian Defense Minister George Fernandes publicly stated that India considers China to be a looming threat and nuclear weapons were one possible way counter to it. See "Fernandes Sounds Warning on China," *Hong Kong Standard*, May 5, 1998, p. 6; "India's New Defense Chief Sees Chinese Military Threat," *New York Times*, May 5, 1998; "India Defence Minister Says China a Threat," *Reuters*, May 18, 1998.

²⁵ For more on this argument see, Evan S. Medeiros, "The Changing Character of China's WMD Proliferation Activities," paper presented at U.S. Congressional Research Service conference on "China and Weapon of Mass Destruction," Washington, D.C., November 1999.

²⁶ Barton Gellman, "Reappraisal Led to New China Policy," *Washington Post*, June 22, 1988, p. 1; Barton Gellman, "U.S. and China Nearly Came to Blows in 1996," *Washington Post*, June 21, 1998, p. 1; Steve Erlanger, "U.S. Says Chinese Will Stop Sending Missiles to Iran," *New York Times*, October 11, 1997, p. 1.

²⁷ One major exception to this was the spring 2000 consultation between the United States and China about the May 2000 NPT Review Conference. Although this was a bilateral consultation between Sha Zukang and U.S. Ambassador Norm Wulf, it was apparently allowed because they discussed *multilateral* nonproliferation issues. During the meetings, both sides apparently traded strategies on how best to achieve a positive outcome for the conference.

²⁸ A CIA reported noted, "Chinese missile-related technical assistance to Pakistan increased during this reporting period." Central Intelligence Agency, *Unclassified Report to Congress on the Acquisition of Technology Relating to Weapons of Mass Destruction and Advanced Conventional Munitions: 1*

July to 31 December 1999, August 9, 2000; this report responds to a congressionally directed action in Section 721 of the Intelligence Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 1997.

²⁹ In September 1997, the Chinese Foreign Ministry established for the first time a department for arms control and disarmament affairs headed by veteran diplomat and arms control expert Sha Zukang. The department has four divisions devoted to nuclear affairs, missiles and conventional weapons affairs, chemical and biological weapons issues, and a comprehensive division that handles the research needs of the department.

³⁰ For a flowchart of the entire arms control community in China see Bates Gill and Evan S. Medeiros, "The Foreign and Domestic Influences on China's Arms Control and Nonproliferation Policies," *China Quarterly* (March 2000), pp. 66-94; for the most up-to-date version of the chart see, <http://cns.miis.edu/cns/projects/eamp/pubs/chinaorg.htm>.

³¹ For accounts of these internal meetings see Fan Jishe, "Junkong he Zhongmei Guanxi Yantaohui Zongshu" [Summary of Conference on Arms Control and US-China Relations], *Meiguo Yanjiu* 13 (Summer 1999); Fan Jishe, "Junkong Xingshi Yantaohui Zongshu" [Summary of Conference on the Arms Control Situation], *Meiguo Yanjiu* 14 (Spring 2000).

³² In the wake of the release of the Cox Report, the Department of Energy was banned from having contact with Chinese weapon laboratories for two years. The Chinese are equally uninterested in meeting with the U.S. labs because of the heightened concerns in the United States about Chinese espionage. So, the lab-to-lab exchange program is functionally halted.

³³ For the linkages between Chinese policies on missile defenses and its arms control policies see Evan S. Medeiros, *Missiles, Missile Defense and Regional Stability*, Conference Report of the 2nd U.S.-China Conference on Arms Control Disarmament and Nonproliferation, Center for Nonproliferation Studies, Monterey Institute of International Studies, April 1999.

³⁴ The newest CIA report describes in broad terms the Chinese missile technology exports see *Unclassified Report to Congress on the Acquisition of Technology Related to Weapons of Mass Destruction and Advanced Conventional Weapons: 1 July through 31 December 1999*.

³⁵ The one glaring exception to this pattern is the 1993 *Yinhe* incident in which the United States incorrectly believed that chemical weapon precursors were aboard the Chinese ship bound for the Middle East. The United States forced the ship to dock in Saudi Arabia, and international inspectors found no illicit contents. The United States never issued a formal apology to China. For a revealing account of this episode see Patrick Tyler, *A Great Wall: Six Presidents and China* (New York: Public Affairs Press, 1999).

³⁶ David Shambaugh, "Sino-U.S. Strategic Relations: From Partners to Competitors," *Survival* 42 (Spring 2000), pp. 97-115.