China’s Nuclear Modernization: Implications for Nuclear Arms Control, US-Chinese Strategic Stability and Asia-Pacific Security

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Briefing to
Center for the Promotion of Disarmament and Non-Proliferation
Japanese Institute for International Affairs
March 6, 2015
History and Status

More than 125,000 warheads produced since 1945
Peak of 64,500 stockpiled warheads in 1986 (70,300 if including retired warheads)

Enormous reductions since 1986 peak:
- ~54,000 warhead stockpile reduction
- ~47,000+ warheads dismantled

~10,000 warheads in stockpiles (~16,000 if counting retired warheads awaiting dismantlement)

US and Russia possess 90% of global inventory (94% if counting retired warheads); each has more than 4 times more warheads than rest of world combined;

Decreasing: US, Russia, Britain, France
Increasing: China, Pakistan, India

Trend: reductions are slowing
China: Modernization

Long, slow modernization; transition from slow liquid-fuel to quick solid-fuel missiles with longer range

ICBM / MRBM
- DF-31A (CSS-10 Mod 2) deploying
- New mobile ICBM test-launching
- Development of new mobile ICBM capable of delivering MIRV

SSBN / SLBM
- Jin (Type-094) SSBN fielding (4-5 expected)
- JL-2 (CSS-N-14) SLBM in development
- Type-096 SSBN possibly in development

Cruise Missiles (?)
- ALCM (CJ-20 on H-6 bomber) in development*
- GLCM (DH-10/CJ-10) fielding**

* Listed in 2013 AFGSC briefing
** Listed by NASIC as “conventional or nuclear;” the same designation as the Russian nuclear-capable AS-4 Kitchen ALCM
China: ICBMs

50-60 ICBMs deployed:

- 20 DF-5A (silo)
- 10 DF-31 (mobile)
- 20-30 DF-31A (mobile)
  (DF-4 retired?)

New ICBM being test-launched

New ICBM in development, possibly capable of MIRV

China has had capability to deploy MIRV on fixed DF-5 since 1990s

MIRV for mobile would be new capability
China: ICBMs

US projections of Chinese ICBMs tend to predict too many too soon
China: ICBMs

Example of DF-31 or DF-31A launch unit training near Haiyan (Qinghai)

Probably launchers from 812 Brigade at Tianshui (Gansu)
China: MRBM

Example of DF-21 launch unit training near Dengshahe (Liaoning)

Probably part of 810 Brigade at Jinzhou (Liaoning)

Recently replaced DF-3A
China: Submarines

Building class of 4-5 Jin SSBNs
Each with 12 JL-2

First seen in 2007 on commercial satellite photos

3 in service, but JL-2 not yet operational

US intelligence community anticipates first patrol soon
China: Submarines

Expansion of Hainan submarine base

First Jin SSBN presence in 2008

Base includes demagnetization facility, underground submarine pier, SLBM handling and transportation system
China: Submarines

Important new capability, but...

- Jin SSBN noisy compared with Russian SSBNs
- To target USA a Jin SSBN would have to sail far into Pacific or Sea of Japan
- Command and control capability is limited

Key unknown: Will Chinese government authorize deployment of nuclear warheads on JL-2 SLBMs in peacetime?

Key questions: If China is concerned about the vulnerability of its retaliatory nuclear force, why deploy a significant portion of it at sea where it can be sunk by enemy submarines?
China In US Nuclear Strategy

- Korean War: Nuclear target to offset large Chinese conventional attack
- 1958 Taiwan Strait crisis: Matador cruise missile deployed to Taiwan; US moves nuclear bombs to Guam and Okinawa to target Chinese air fields
- 1960s: Proliferation development; deterring Chinese nuclear use; US deploys nuclear bombs to Taiwan; SSBN deployments begin at Guam
- 1970s: NUWEP-74 with 2 major attack options and ; bombs withdrawn from Taiwan and Okinawa; fighter wings at Okinawa, Philippines and South Korea continued SIOP alert against China; 10 SSBNs in Pacific
- 1980s: China removed from SIOP (partner against Soviet Union); Poseidon SSBNs phased out in Pacific; Trident SSBNs deployed; China responds with new ICBMs
- 1990s: STRATCOM identifies need for “major-attack response plan” (see image); Taiwan Strait crisis (1995-1996); China returned to SIOP (PDD-60, 1997); increased targeting
- 2000s: CHISOP planning (see image); China is “immediate or potential contingency;” Trident II DS SLBM and W88 deployed in Pacific (hard target kill); most SSBNs patrol in Pacific; continued bomber deployments to Guam
- 2010s: Jin SSBNs and emerging MIRV potential; Trident II enhancements; B61-12 and LRSO; increased focus on advanced conventional (precision, missile defense, cyber)
China In Nuclear Strike Planning

- Strategic planning against China is embedded in STRATCOM’s OPLAN 8010-12 (July 2012): Strategic Deterrence and Force Employment

- China one of six adversaries (probably Russia, China, North Korea, Iran, Syria and 9/11-type WMD scenario)

- OPLAN 8010-12 is nuclear employment portion (previously SIOP) of larger plan (OPLAN 8010 base plan)

- Includes four types of nuclear attack options:
  - Basic Attack Options (BAOs)
  - Selective Attack Options (SAOs)
  - Emergency Response Options (EROs)
  - Directed/Adaptive Planning Capability Options

- STRATCOM also supports PACOM regional strike plan against China

Source: STRATCOM OPLAN 8010 briefing slide obtained by FAS under FOIA
United States: Modernization

ICBM
- Minuteman III life-extension completing
- Warhead fuzes/interoperable warhead planned
- GBSD (ICBM replacement) in development

SSBN / SLBM
- Trident II D5 SLBM life-extension development
- SSBN replacement development (12 planned)
- W76-1 warhead life-extension deploying
- W88-1 warhead life-extension development

Bombers
- Upgrade of B-2 and B-52 underway
- LRS-B next-generation bomber in development
- B61-12 guided standoff bomb in development
- LRSO (ALCM) replacement in development

Tactical
- F-35A nuclear capability in development
- B61-12 guided standoff in development

Infrastructure
- Uranium Processing Facility (secondaries) construction
- Plutonium production facilities (primaries) construction
- Warhead surveillance/simulation facilities upgrade
Summary

• Chinese nuclear modernization long-coming, slow, but significant with important operational and targeting implications

• Strategic stability challenged by overall asymmetry of nuclear and conventional forces, conventional DF-21, and Jin SSBN operations

• How to allow China to “rise” in stable manner? Is it possible?

• Increased focus of US nuclear (and other) planning

• US/allies confident in extended deterrence capabilities

• Growing US missile defense capability may trigger Chinese MIRV

• Nuclear arms control in Pacific region stalled with important danger of worsening (Chinese modernization and increase, Russian modernization, North Korea, US modernization)

• New initiatives needed to reverse trend