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CHINA ANALYSIS IS CHINA A RELIABLE PARTNER IN NON-PROLIFERATION?

CONTENT

Strategic culture, power balances and the analysis of geopolitical shifts are a long-standing Chinese obsession. Academic institutions, think-tanks, journals and web-based debate are growing in number and quality. They underpin the breadth and depth of Chinese foreign policies.

China Analysis introduces European audiences to the debates inside China's expert and think-tank world, and helps the European policy community understand how China's leadership thinks about domestic and foreign policy issues. While freedom of expression and information remain restricted in China's media, these published sources and debates are the only available access we have to understand emerging trends within China.

China Analysis mainly draws on Chinese mainland sources, but also monitors content in Chinese-language publications from Hong Kong and Taiwan. Reports from Hong Kong and Taiwan reflect the diversity of Chinese thinking, with occasional news and analysis unpublished in the mainland.

Each issue of China Analysis in English is focused on a specific theme, and presents policy debates and options which are relevant to Europeans. A French version of China Analysis exists since 2005, and has been widely distributed in academic and policy circles. For back issues (French and English) or excerpts, please click here or visit www.centreasia.org. **To subscribe or unsubscribe, please send a message to chinaanalysis@centreasia.org.**

Introduction by Francois Godement

Combating nuclear proliferation has become one of the underlying reasons for Western engagement with China, particularly for Europe which has been to the fore in seeking diplomatic solutions to the Iranian crisis. These overtures have not been ignored. Supporters of multilateralism have seized on Beijing's endorsement of limited sanctions against Iran and North Korea as a sign that China now backs the international system where it counts.

This special report on China and proliferation should provide a reality check to the most optimistic prophets of China's transformation into a responsible international stake-holder. Our analysis shows that Chinese policy-makers, officials, and intellectuals still harbour fundamental disagreements with the West on non-proliferation.

The experts cited here from Chinese language media are key members of China's strategic community. They are Pan Zhenqiang, a former military attaché in Washington and one of China's main official spokesmen abroad; Admiral Yang Yi of the National Defence University, one of the People's Liberation Army's best known strategic officers; General Xu Guanyu of the Chinese Association for Arms Control and Disarmament; ex-nuclear physicist Shen Dingli, now Director of American Studies at Fudan University, and one of China's foremost international specialists; Li Bin, Qinghua University's best known disarmament expert; Tian Wenlin, Iran expert at China's first strategic think tank, the China Contemporary Institute of International Relations (CICIR); and, Zhao Qinghai of the China Institute

of International Studies (CIIS) -- the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs' in-house think tank.

Their thinking displays striking similarities with implications that sometimes challenge official Chinese policy. For instance, Shen Dingli argues that sanctions against proliferators such as Iran and North Korea are useless unless they affect their vital interests.

This is in marked contrast to China's position in the Security Council, where it uses all of its influence to resist binding sanctions "with teeth" and usually settles for limited, often non-binding, sanctions.

Chinese experts do not fundamentally see proliferation as an evil; at best they consider it a necessary or irresistible one. They argue that the spread of all new weapons is an inevitable law of history and that proliferation helps to balance the United States' ever increasing nuclear supremacy. They dissect the Non-Proliferation Treaty's known failures, emphasising the double standard applied to the atomic haves and the atomic have-nots which is perhaps the Treaty's founding principle.

There is some common ground with mainstream European thinking. Zhao Qinqhai relates how the US has weakened anti-Proliferation mechanisms -- by reducing funding for the International Atomic Energy Association (IAEA) and withdrawing from the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty (ABM). In early 2008, exactly when China was coming to a co-operative attitude at the Security Council on Iran, our experts are staunch in their defence of Iran's rationale for nuclear programs, sometimes endorsing the coming reality of an Iranian nuclear weapon.

None of the experts advises that China withdraw cooperation on proliferation. But the rationale for Chinese cooperation is never based on a support for norms, international rules, concerns for multilateralism or its own security. The one exception for the latter is Chinese worries that non-state proliferators could plan terrorist attack on China's territory.

China's experts are convinced that the spread of nuclear weapons will continue and that Iran and North Korea's programmes will be at best "contained" at. Their rationale for cooperation is realist: first, China should maintain its own nuclear superiority over some potential new competitors; second, new regional nuclear powers could promote instability and harm China's interests; and third, China can use non-proliferation as a foreign policy tool to promote views on "global harmony" and to wield leverage over the US and Europe.

None of this is entirely unjustified. Scepticism about the NPT and second thoughts about disarmament are not unique to China. But the Chinese strategic community's worldview seems blinkered and incapable of offering a

single prescription or concrete policy formula in any area. Aside from terrorism, they assume that China is immune to the consequences of proliferation. It is extraordinary that there is no mention of China's growing participation in arms limitations treaties and non-proliferation cooperation. The overwhelming majority of these analysts do not address the demand of many non-nuclear states for unfettered access to civilian nuclear energy. The reason for this is that as an established member of the nuclear club, China thinks this development will not affect its interests.

The picture that emerges from this special report is of a free-riding member of the nuclear club which will use its diplomatic clout as it sees fit. The Chinese foreign policy elite is saying that their country will continue to cooperate on proliferation but they are under no obligation to do so and certainly won't bear the costs of non-proliferation efforts.

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1. Non-Proliferation, a means, not an end in itself?

by Mathieu Duchâtel

Based on a summary by Peng Xiao of the third report from the Conference of Experts on "Nuclear Proliferation and International Security", organised by the International Policy Research Centre of the People's Liberation Army Foreign Languages Institute and the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences in Beijing on 16 October 2007, published in *Shijie Jingji yu Zhengzhi*, no. 1, March 2008, pp. 78-80.

Non-proliferation is not a major priority for China. It is viewed among Chinese experts as an American agenda, designed to secure US supremacy.

Nuclear proliferation is the result of the increasing power imbalance between the U.S. and every other state, which does not pose a fundamental threat to Chinese interests.

However, China has three reasons to support non-proliferations efforts: to preserve China's own superiority over potential regional nuclear powers; to promote the Chinese goal of a "harmonious world" (和諧世界, *hexie shijie*)¹; and to extract leverage over the United States and Europe, improving China's image in the process.

¹ Building a "harmonious world" has been a key slogan for China's foreign policy under Hu Jintao. Introduced in September 2005, the concept of "harmonious world" encompasses support for multilateralism, mutual beneficial cooperation, reform of the UNSC... It has been built against the notion of a clash of civilisations.

These were the striking conclusions of a meeting in October 2007 attended by influential experts from the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS), the National Defence University (NDU), the Chinese Institute for Contemporary International Relations (CICIR), Fudan University, and the PLA Foreign Languages Institute. Up for debate were US non-proliferation policies and their effect on Chinese interests.

Their analyses are influenced by a degree of Marxism, and indeed Maoism. They view nuclear proliferation as an historical necessity and as an act of “immanent justice” which imposes equality within international relations. For these thinkers, proliferation is primarily an American problem, exacerbated by the policies of the Bush administration. It follows that China’s participation in counter-proliferation efforts can be used as leverage its relations with the US, and even with the EU.

There is broad consensus among Chinese experts that nuclear proliferation is inevitable since the acquisition of atomic weapons appears rational to them. Wang Yizhou, Director of Research at the CASS, observes that the scientific, industrial, and financial obstacles to developing nuclear technology are diminishing. A former military attaché to the US, General Pan Zhenqiang of the National Defence University argues that it is a law of nature (规律, guilü) that every new technology ends up being “proliferated”. Nevertheless, General Pan maintains that the Chemical Weapons Convention² and the Biological Weapons Convention³ are more effective than the NPT. While conceding that the Treaty has helped limit proliferation and that some of its mechanisms are effective, he claims that it suffers from a lack of legitimacy within many developing countries. This is a view widely held in China’s academic community and within the PLA.

For these thinkers, proliferation is primarily an American problem, exacerbated by the policies of the Bush administration.

nuclear weapons. Power imbalances between states drive the international system. Moreover, it is inevitable that each nation’s nuclear programme will have a knock-on effect, as has been the case with India and Pakistan as well as the Middle East, and, arguably, North-East Asia too. Some states perceive a strategic reward in the acquisition of nuclear weapons.

He further argues that the injustice of the international order remains a major incentive for getting hold of

² The Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production, Stockpiling and Use of Chemical Weapons and on their Destruction was signed in 1993 and came into force in 1997. It was signed by 178 States with China among the founding signatories. It was ratified by the Chinese parliament in 1996. However, the Pentagon suspects that China is pursuing a secret chemical weapons programme. See “Proliferation: Threat and Response”, Office of the Secretary of Defense, January 2001.

³ The Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production and Stockpiling of Bacteriological (Biological) and Toxin Weapons and on their Destruction was signed in 1972 and came into force in 1975. China joined it in 1984. Some suspicions remain that China harbours a secret biological weapons programme.

Like many Chinese analysts, General Pan thinks the NPT is at a crossroads. Its authority is at stake in the medium term. If the problems of North Korea and Iran can be contained (though not necessarily resolved -- a subtle difference), Pan predicts that the NPT may be strengthened for some time to come. A new American administration should also have a positive influence.

But for multilateral sanctions to be effective, they must be backed by a real threat of war. As former nuclear physicist Shen Dingli, the Director of American studies at Fudan University, puts it: sanctions are not credible unless they strike at the vital interests of the State being targeted. This has not been the case with Iran and North Korea.

There is also a problem, according to Yang Mingjie of the China Institute of International Contemporary Relations, with the ambiguous and loose wording of the definition of “non-state actors” in resolution 1540 passed by the UN Security Council⁴. He concurs with most European experts that there is little risk of non-state actors launching a nuclear warhead against a state, but does not rule out the potential for a terrorist attack using a dirty bomb.

The roundtable participants strongly agree that US global strategy is the main cause of nuclear proliferation. Wang Yizhou denounces the injustice of American policies, particularly Washington’s double standards on proliferation. The US constantly increases its nuclear superiority over all the other states. Faced with allies or potential allies - such as India and Israel - the United States keeps “one eye closed and the other open” (睁一只眼闭一只眼, zheng yi zhi yan bi yi zhi yan), thereby directly encouraging proliferation. On the other hand, Washington has no truck with international law when facing states it sees as hostile.

Chinese experts thus suggest that US non-proliferation policy is based on false arguments, and self-defeating. The case is put forward by Xu Jia (PLA Foreign Languages Institute). Firstly, the overwhelming superiority of its information resources allows Washington to detect, in real time, most of the suspect activities taking place across the globe. Secondly, the U.S. administrations and operators directly involved in counterproliferation, as well as the U.S. government as a whole, share an ideological assumption that democratic States will never develop nuclear weapons on their own, but that every dictatorship is tempted to do so. And there arises the risk of misperception. The US intelligence community, intellectually dominated by the utterances of politicians rather than by technical specialists, is therefore shot through with prejudices (先入为主, xianru weizhu). Its approach to proliferation only reflects its own idiosyncratic thinking, not the reality (镜像思维, jingxiang siwei).

⁴ Resolution 1540 was passed on April 28th 2004. It defines a non-state actor as follows: “individual or entity, not acting under the lawful authority of any state in conducting activities which come within the scope of this resolution”.

Professor Li Bin, an arms control specialist at Tsinghua University, perceives American non-proliferation policy as a way of containing China's rise by countering the PLA's deterrence capabilities. He further argues that the US is constantly challenging the "nuclear taboo" (核禁忌, he jinji) by improving its deterrence capabilities and threatening to strike pre-emptively. The fact that the nuclear balance of power between the US and China is discussed within the framework of a roundtable on proliferation is telling. China is among the potential targets for an American nuclear attack, particularly in the event of any conflict over Taiwan.⁵ The Pentagon is constantly reviewing new targets for a nuclear attack on Chinese territory. The US Pacific Command (USPACOM) is reinforcing its deterrence capabilities with ballistic missile submarines (SSBNs) and strategic bomber squadrons based in Guam. Washington's planned anti-missile defence system is aimed at neutralising China's second strike capability. As the US sets up space-based radar monitoring assets, the level of awareness among PLA's officers that nuclear power imbalance between the US and China is growing continues to increase.

According to General Pan, proliferation is a concern for Beijing, but unlike the United States, the Chinese do not consider the issue to be central to national security. He says this divergence is a source of potential conflict, affecting not only Sino-American relations but also China's international relations generally. Indeed, it could have a destabilising effect on Asian regional security. Pan may be thinking of the Proliferation Security Initiative, which China and South Korea have not joined, unlike most states in the region. For China, the main point is not non-proliferation in itself, but its effect on China's position in the international system.

In this way, Pan portrays nuclear power as an instrument of "Western" domination over developing countries. This lends a certain moral justification to proliferation as a means of emancipating these states from imperial domination. But Pan balances this with a word of caution: China should adopt a flexible attitude towards the different developing countries with nuclear programmes. Each situation is unique. Some states aspire to regional hegemony while others are challenging international law. In these circumstances, Pan concedes Western non-proliferation policy can help maintain international stability. China is both a developing country and a nuclear power. This means that Beijing has to find the right balance between protecting its national nuclear superiority and defending its idea of international justice. This calls for a flexible approach from China, which should adapt its position to the circumstances of each case. General Yang Yi, the Director of the Department of Strategic Studies at NDU, urges that China see the struggle against proliferation as an opportunity to advance its strategic interests. Non-proliferation should be both a means of

strengthening national security and a tool for "building a harmonious world" in line with President Hu Jintao's vision. Non-proliferation should thus be an important consideration when formulating foreign policy, export controls, and positions on international security.

In sum, the conference participants finally approve of China joining counter-proliferation efforts. But this is not a question of principle for them. Rather they recommend applying non-proliferation policies on a case by case basis in line with Chinese interests.

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2. The Iranian nuclear problem, or "the maggot in the fruit"

by Valérie Demeure-Vallée

Based on:

- Tian Wenlin, "Explanations of the strategic aspects of the Iranian nuclear crisis", *Xiandai Guoji Guanxi*, no. 10, 2007.
- Tian Wenlin, "What can we learn from the Iranian nuclear problem?", *Shijie Zhishi*, March 4th 2008.

China may be mildly supportive of sanctions against Iran inside the US Security Council but the little-followed academic debate within the country is even more ambivalent. Tian Wenlin⁶ represents the mainstream view among Chinese international relations scholars that power politics trumps any concern for international security. He classes the issue as a power struggle between the United States and Iran, arguing that the former is a superpower in decline, eager to use military force, especially in the Middle East, as a last resort to preserve its fading hegemony. For Tian, Iran's rise threatens American goals in the region. Drawing on structural realist theories of international relations, Tian has written two articles over past year which seek to rationalise Iran's quest for nuclear weapons as a typical post-Cold War development. He is unconcerned by the regional and international consequences of a nuclear armed Iran. Ominously, Tian's second article was published in *Shijie Zhishi*, a seven decades old publication known for launching many intellectual debates, on March 4th, 2008, exactly one day after China adopted the third UNSC resolution against Iran⁷.

⁶ Tian Wenlin is a specialist of Middle East issues at the China Institutes on Contemporary International Relations, a leading think-tank for security issues and part of China's intelligence community.

⁷ These were Resolutions no. 1737 (December 23rd 2006), no. 1747 (March 24th 2007), and no. 1803 (March 3rd 2008)

⁵ Since the Nuclear Posture Review submitted to Congress by the Pentagon on January 8th 2002.

Tian argues as follows: The persistent failure to settle the Iranian nuclear question is a sign of weakening American power. Neither US threats of force, nor diplomatic initiatives conducted by the Europeans⁸ and, later by the Americans, nor Security Council sanctions have been effective. Iran has withstood American pressure to give up uranium enrichment. Teheran has become the “maggot in the fruit” (心脏大患, xinzang dahuan) of US Middle Eastern policy. The Americans have caught themselves in a trap by overestimating their capabilities in a futile effort to attain regional hegemony.

The persistent failure to settle the Iranian nuclear question is a sign of weakening American power.

Tian stresses the shrewdness of Iran’s strategy in confronting the US over this issue, praising Iranian resolve and preparedness for a possible military conflict with the Americans, whom he advises to be cautious and more conciliatory. Yet Tian is not just a propagandist for Teheran. He advocates a peaceful outcome to the crisis and acknowledges the threat to Chinese interests in Iran posed by the government’s nuclear programme, particularly with regard to Chinese military and energy concerns⁹. He concludes nonetheless that the Iranian crisis illustrates the necessity of military build-up for a country to guarantee its existence and development.

Tian’s articles are marked by a fierce anti-American rhetoric and present China as a disinterested spectator of international relations. International security is scarcely mentioned; and non-proliferation is besides the point since Tian sees Iran’s nuclear programme as only one element of a larger power struggle. The conduct of the Chinese suggests it may not entirely be unaffected by this line of analysis. China may have voted for all three Security Council resolutions imposing sanctions on Teheran. But she also deployed all her influence with the other members of the Council to reduce their effectiveness.

Tian denounces the “strategic microcosm of the global and regional order” devised by the US after the collapse of the Soviet Union. He even accounts for Iranian resistance over uranium enrichment as a refusal to submit to the theories of Zbigniew Brzezinski¹⁰. According to Brzezinski, the US was compelled to maintain and expand its dominance in order to ensure global stability, which was threatened by any competing power. Consequently, Tian argues that the US wants to dominate Iran.

He also presents American policy in the Middle East as being mainly driven by energy concerns, arguing that the

American interventions in Iran’s neighbouring countries, Afghanistan and Iraq were about oil. This has backfired, in Tian’s view, because the close links between the governing Iraqi Shiite party and the Iranian government pose a long-term threat to American oil interests in the region.

The Iranian government hit a raw nerve for the United States when it decided in 2006 to replace the dollar with the euro as the exchange currency for its foreign trade transactions, largely made up of oil sales. Tian views this as an attempt to force other OPEC countries to abandon the dollar, which has been their currency of choice since the 1973 oil crisis.

This thorough-going anti-Americanism is further apparent in Tian’s contention that military force is the only card Washington has left to play in its quest for political and economic dominance. Iran’s nuclear enrichment programmes and military build-up reflects a refusal to be reduced to an American vassal. And in the event of a conflict between Teheran and Washington, Tian even contemplates the possibility of an Iranian victory. In his opinion, the US strategy of “oppressing the weak and fearing the strong” could “lead them to their own undoing” (自取灭亡, ziqu miawang). He speculates about the potential for a reversal of the power relationship, believing that if Iran successfully develops the bomb, this could entail “the relative collapse of one power and the rise of another” (双方的此消彼长, shuanfang de cixiao bichang) -- at least within the Middle East.

In support of his contentions about American decline, Tian stresses Washington’s strategic mistakes in its Middle Eastern policy and its weakening ability to act. American leadership has been damaged by the quagmire in Iraq, the worsening situation in Afghanistan, and the strengthening of Hezbollah’s political position in Lebanon after the war in the mid-2006. Teheran has taken advantage of the situation and adopted an intransigent position on the nuclear issue, thus presenting itself as a regional power capable of rivalling the American enemy and damaging all its interests in the region, from the security of Israel to the use of the dollar as the exchange currency for oil.

Tian’s views reflect the dominant thinking in Chinese strategic circles, emphasising power relationships and changing balances of power. There is an underlying current of identification with Iran, which Tian thinks is set to rise and become the Middle East’s top dog as China has done in Asia. In complete contrast with his core argument, Tian backs China’s support for UN sanctions against Iran over the nuclear issue.

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⁸ See Georges Le Guelte, “Le défi nucléaire” in *Questions internationales*, no. 25, May-June 2007, pp. 48-50.

⁹ See Michal Meidan, “Chine-Iran: des relations pragmatiques”, a discussion paper which can be found on the Asia Centre website: www.centreasia.org/media/files/AsiaCentre_OGP_note-CR_20061012.pdf

¹⁰ See the theories expounded by Zbigniew Brzezinski in *The Grand Chessboard* (1997) and *The Choice* (2004)

3. Fighting proliferation - the Chinese way

by Michal Meidan

Based on: Zhao Qinghai, "The challenges facing the international non-proliferation system and its future prospects", China Institute for International Studies, March 2008.

Zhao Qinghai is a researcher at the China Institute of International Studies, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' top think tank, where he heads the department for information and contingency analysis. His analysis paints a bleak picture of the effectiveness of the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and of its future prospects. Zhao proceeds ambiguously. He begins by endorsing the treaty's role in ensuring disarmament and non-proliferation. He then points out its numerous weaknesses, before concluding with a promise that China will actively promote the search for a nuclear-free world. But although he criticises a system, which he considers dominated by the United States, he doesn't provide clear alternative solutions.

Given China's increasing importance in the context of challenges to non-proliferation in Asia and the Middle East, this hazy official position is worrisome to say the least.

Zhao begins by praising the treaty as the cornerstone of international non-proliferation efforts: It "allows for a co-ordination in strategic relations between the nuclear powers, strengthens predictability in the international system, [...] and contributes towards the security and stability [of the system]."

Then comes the criticism: The NPT's defects cannot be ignored, for they only aggravate insecurity in the current international situation.

First, Zhao says the NPT is unbalanced in its definition of the signatories' rights and obligations. The Nuclear Weapons States (NWS) enjoy more rights than the Non-Nuclear Weapon States (NNWS), and can shirk their responsibilities more easily. The treaty's stated goals are disarmament, non-proliferation, and the peaceful use of nuclear energy. But Western countries ignore the latter goal by undermining the ambitions of NNWS to acquire nuclear capabilities for civilian use. Furthermore, NWS are subject to poorly regulated verification procedures. These double standards are a source of discontent among NPT signatories and give other countries an excuse not to sign up.

Zhao argues that these trends have been exacerbated over the past decade. US unilateralism is destabilising the international system and inducing other countries to build up nuclear capabilities. Not only have Americans weakened the NPT by decreasing their financial contribution to

the IAEA, but their withdrawal from the Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) treaty, followed by a drive to update their nuclear arsenal, has pushed Russia and the UK in the same direction. Zhao concedes that this obviously has the merit of strengthening their nuclear deterrence. But it also leads to a slowdown in the disarmament process; induces a new arms race, now including Developing countries with nuclear ambitions; and makes any attempt at persuading the latter to give up their nuclear programmes appear hypocritical.

Second, Zhao asserts that the Treaty is powerless in the face of non-signatory countries. American double standards further compromise the treaty. Whereas Iran and North Korea are threatened with political, economic, and military sanctions unless they give up their nuclear programmes, Zhao says the US "turns a blind eye" to the Israeli, Indian, and Pakistani programmes, thus giving them "a sign of tacit approval". Moreover, although India has not signed the NPT, it enjoys civilian co-operation with the United States, which could lead to the transfer of sensitive technology from the US to India. The United States has opened "the Pandora's box of nuclear proliferation". Under these circumstances, asks the writer, why should Iran accept a compromise?

Third, the Treaty is weak in the face of "non-state" proliferation which according to Zhao, has been growing rapidly for more than a decade. The increasing availability of nuclear know-how makes any control over proliferation difficult. Moreover, declining reserves of fossil fuel and their soaring prices, alongside environmental imperatives, have spurred renewed enthusiasm for the civilian nuclear option. Once uranium enrichment and the combustion cycle have been mastered, a nuclear bomb is relatively easy to create. In Northeast Asia, 109 nuclear plants are already in operation; 18 are under construction; and a further 110 are being planned.

According to Zhao, the combination of readily-available technology and an unstable international system mean it is little surprise that certain countries are developing their nuclear military capabilities under the cover of civilian programmes. At present there are about sixty countries with ongoing or planned civilian nuclear programmes; forty of these will probably master this technology very soon, which means they will have the capability to produce nuclear bombs. The risk of this capability falling into the hands of terrorist groups is correspondingly greater.

Fourth, Zhao maintains that the Treaty provides no way of reacting to infractions on the part of any signatory country. The international community is divided over the measures to be taken in the case of any defection; North Korea is a case in point. Following Pyongyang's withdrawal in 2003, the United States pushed for sanctions on North Korea, whereas other "non-aligned" countries preferred to refer the issue to the UN. Hence, both the Treaty and the international resolve to fight against non-proliferation are constantly being put to the test, and the response is inadequate:

In 1998 the problem was Indian and Pakistani nuclear tests; in 2003 it was the North Korean withdrawal from the NPT; and more recently it has been Iran's behaviour. The UN Security Council resolutions (implicitly supported by Zhao) have not dissuaded the latter two countries from pursuing their programmes.

The prospect of an arms race in North-East Asia and the Middle East is becoming increasingly likely in Zhao's view. 13 Arab countries have already announced their ambition to become nuclear powers (the author does not seem to distinguish, however, between civilian and military programmes), and in Japan there is renewed debate over the question. The Director General of the IAEA believes that at the current rate, over thirty countries will acquire nuclear capability (albeit without stating the time frame). In the meantime, the disarmament process is at a stalemate.

In the face of these threats, the IAEA has passed new resolutions, and some signatory countries are looking to beef up non-proliferation initiatives, but the "differences in approaches" make it difficult to reach any form of international consensus. Moreover, Zhao says the proposals "treat the symptoms without getting at the root cause" which is regional and international instability.

Finally, Zhao prescribes some Chinese medicine for the NPT. The solution proposed by the author leaves a lot to be desired. It amounts to a system of collective security based on the five principles of peaceful coexistence as applied in the Chinese New Security Concept of 1997: "What we need is a system of mutual trust, mutual benefits, and equality [...], a system of strengthened multilateral co-operation, an improvement in the international system, and a bolstering of the security of each state". But at the same time, in a thinly veiled criticism of the United States, the author denounces double standards in the implementation of the NPT, the development of anti-missile shields ("which undermine international strategic stability"), and the deployment of space-based weapons.

In sum, China's proposal, "supported by other countries", is for a denuclearised world...That still leaves us with the problem of how to get there.

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4. Proliferation, a step towards nuclear disarmament?

by Mathieu Duchâtel

Based on: Xu Guangyu, "The trend of history and future developments in nuclear proliferation", *Shijie jingji yu zhengzhi*, no. 329, January 2008, pp. 65-69.

Nuclear proliferation is unavoidable. That is the fatalistic view of General Xu Guanyu¹¹, who even takes a favourable view of the spread of nuclear weapons. Reading between the lines, he sees it as a positive factor in encouraging the development of a multipolar international system. This reflects the traces of a still influential Maoist heritage: in the 1950s, after all, China considered that proliferation was necessary to break the hegemony of American imperialism and Soviet revisionism. Nonetheless, General Xu acknowledges that China must do everything possible to prevent non-state organisations from acquiring the bomb, although he considers this to be quite likely. Xu does not defend proliferation as legitimate but criticises current counter-proliferation efforts, which he fears are a means of reinforcing Western hegemony. He adds that the "vertical proliferation" in the NWS promotes "horizontal proliferation" in NNWS. By modernising their nuclear arsenal through technological advances, especially through miniaturisation and the development of bunker-busting tactical weapons, NWS are fostering a new arms race. And they are increasing the risk that atomic weapons could be used by terrorist groups. Proliferation thus becomes, Xu's view, a counter-measure by those states which feel threatened by the West's nuclear monopoly.

The General maintains nonetheless that nuclear proliferation is just a passing historical episode, though it is set to accelerate in coming years. Eventually however, proliferation will give way to a world free from the risk of nuclear conflict between states. If General Xu is to be believed, nuclear weapons will multiply in number before disappearing. Nuclear proliferation is at the very heart of the whole problem of arms control, which is a central issue for the maintenance of international security. But "it should not give rise to excessive pessimism; it is not an insoluble problem; it is only a problem which will continue for a certain time".

¹¹ Xu Guangyu is a retired Major General, and member of the Consultative Committee of the Chinese Association for Arms Control and Disarmament (中国军控与裁军协会, Zhongguo junkong yu zaijun xiehui). This association is quite influential in promoting expertise on issues of proliferation and arms control. It is headed by Ma Zhenggang, an ex-ambassador to Dublin and Berlin, and ex-director of the Department of American and Oceanic Affairs at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Beijing, now also director of the MoFA's main think tank, CIIS.

General Xu believes that the nuclear weapons will be transformed into tools to serve humanity's conquest of nature. Meanwhile, he thinks the policy of non-proliferation will fail, the number of states with nuclear weapons will increase, and that we cannot rule out the possibility of non-state actors acquiring nuclear weapons. It is not in China's interest, he says, to rescue the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), which he considers a lost cause. His main preoccupation seems to be to justify China's refusal to participate in the 2003 US Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI).

From 1945 to 1968, when states began joining the NPT, nuclear history was in its first phase, defined by the breaking of the American monopoly on the bomb. The development of nuclear weapons by other powers brought about a balance in international relations. The second phase, in which the world is still immersed, began in 1968 and "will continue to preoccupy mankind for several decades". It is characterised by the conflict between proliferation and non-proliferation. This basic contradiction "will sometimes be underlying and sometimes overt, on some occasions urgent and on others less so".

What follows from this is a matter of pure historical conjecture. General Xu bets on a hypothetical stabilisation of proliferation. Some states, who wish to acquire the bomb for their own security, will get what they want. Most of the non-state organisations currently trying to get hold of military nuclear capability will turn away from this goal because their demands will be met through political means, or will disappear in the face of economic development. Then the world of nuclear power will enter the third phase of its history. NWS will still be a minority, which the General puts at 10% of the world's states - as opposed to the current 4% - amounting to about 15 countries. Their number will stop growing, and some will even opt for denuclearisation. But the balance within this third phase will remain unstable, and proliferation could take off again, for two reasons. Firstly, technical innovations and the constantly falling costs of production will be new incentives to acquire a nuclear bomb. This temptation will be increased whenever there is a regional or international political crisis. It is noticeable that although the writer does not address the probability of a nuclear conflict between states or terrorist groups using a nuclear bomb, he is careful not to rule it out. But his long-term approach seems to imply that he considers this would be a mere detail.

Finally, Xu predicts that in the fourth and last stage - the end of nuclear history - atomic weapons will be put to the service of the common good. States and non-state organisations will lose interest in owning them. A key factor in this development will be technological: conventional weapons will be so effective that they will replace non-conventional weapons. The nuclear states, beginning with the US and Russia, will put a freeze on the development of their nuclear arsenal, followed by a reduction in their weapons stockpile,

all under the watch of international agencies. Of course, to reach this situation, certain preconditions will have to be met. The world will have gone through several decades of peaceful development and the inequalities in development between different states will have been reduced. There will be financial mechanisms to ensure a fairer distribution of the world's resources. International relations will have become more "democratic" as all states assume the same rights and duties. The UN will be the guarantor of international security, and its charter will be strictly applied. Once these conditions are met, General Xu believes that atomic weapons will no longer be used for war.

Yet Xu does not think we should scrap the bomb. Nuclear weapons will help mankind to conquer nature -- to build canals, to alter landscapes, to avoid climate disasters (for example, by preventing the formation of cyclones), and to destroy meteorites heading towards the earth. In a strange turn, Xu says we should not rule out military use of the bomb against extraterrestrial attack. General Xu has clearly learned to stop worrying and love the bomb and he shows limitless imagination when it comes to finding uses for nuclear weapons. There is scant consideration for nuclear radiation, fall-out and other minor considerations.

After this excursion into futurology, General Xu asks how has proliferation been largely contained since 1968? Only Israel, India, and Pakistan have joined the nuclear club since the adoption of the NPT (he notes in passing that North Korea is "in the process of giving up its nuclear military programme"). Doesn't this development show that proliferation can be controlled? He observes that international law has been instrumental in this regard. In addition to the treaties on nuclear-free zones, the NPT has allowed a feeling of security to spread among most states, causing them to lose interest in the acquisition of nuclear weapons.

A second factor is that the acquisition of nuclear weapons calls for economic, technological, and diplomatic sacrifices which are beyond the reach of most States. There will be further proliferation because neither international law nor prohibitive costs can stand in the way of states which wish are determined set up their own nuclear military programme. But there will not be many of them.

¹² Vast areas of the planet are protected by regional treaties against the spread of nuclear weapons: the Antarctic, under the Antarctic Treaty of 1959; the South Pacific, under the Rarotonga Treaty of 1985; Southeast Asia, under the Bangkok Treaty of 1985; and Africa, under the Pelindaba Treaty of 1996.

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