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Irresponsibility and Perception of Threat: The Assumptions Regarding China's Nuclear Advancement

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Abstract

Recent technological modernisation in China's nuclear arsenal that includes fast breeder reactors and Dual Use Airlaunch Ballistic Missiles have prompted the United States and the Western concern over a possibility of Chinese intention of initiating a nuclear arms race (SIPRI, 2024; Hawkins, 2025). China has time and again denied such claims and has reiterated its nuclear policy being rooted in self-defense, deterrence and No First Use policy (NFU). Deliberating on China's strategic understanding of nuclear weapons, its nuclear policy and its participation in international non-proliferation and arms control regimes, this article elucidates on the understanding of a distinct Chinese strategy of utility, advancement and effectiveness of nuclear power in international order. The analysis draws on the threat perception theory in international relations (Jervis, 1976; Walt, 1985), to argue that the U.S. and its Western allies projected threat of a nuclear arms race initiated by China is based on lack of cognitive understanding of distinct nuclear security strategy and vision of an East Asian power resulting in a constricted and misperceived narrative of Chinese threat. The article argues that enhanced

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understanding and accommodation of distinct strategic cultures, needs and interests beyond dominant western norms and perception can effectively limit formation of misperceptions and conflictual attitude and can enhance the scope of comprehending diverse ideas of security and strategic vision amidst a fractious, uncertain and conflict-ridden international order.

Keywords: China, Nuclear Weapon, Security, Threat Perception, Accommodation.

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Introduction

International politics in the last decade was abundant with discussions regarding the improbability of war among states in the future as the liberal interdependent world order has made wars extremely costly and destabilising. Robert Jervis claimed that in the foreseeable future, it is unlikely that the major powers will go into war with each other. This is “perhaps the single most striking discontinuity that the history of international politics has anywhere provided” (Jervis, 2002).

However, the discontinuity was short lived and wars returned to the international system negating such claims and proving that the liberal order is showing signs of decay. The recent conflicts suggest that large-scale state warfare has reemerged most shockingly after two decades of the liberal propaganda that economic interdependence has rendered state to state war improbable. If the Russia Ukraine war is considered an anomaly, the ongoing Israel Hamas war, the conflict between India and Pakistan proves that economic interdependence has been overshadowed by parochial hard-power national interest. What makes the situation more ominous is the presence of a modern nuclear arsenal at the disposal of these powers.

International arms control and non-proliferation regimes have been undergoing credibility crisis; threat posed to validity of NPT by North Korea, India, Pakistan, the refusal of U.S senate to consider ratification of CTBT; the abrogation of Anti-Ballistic missile treaty (ABM) to name a few. Despite challenges, these international regimes persists and in few cases are expanding indicating their centrality in global politics. Membership to these regimes has become a token of acceptability for any nation into the “civilized club” reflecting a commitment to disarmament and collective security. Most of the non-proliferation regimes

were formed and thereafter sustained by U.S. suited to its preferred goals of nuclear limitations and disarmament which has failed to either curb the growth of new nuclear arsenals by signed members and has also failed to secure the acceptance of emerging powers like India.

Many reports from U.S. Defense Department, thinktanks and policy institutes have highlighted Chinese endeavours since 2023 to engage in building its largest nuclear build up with 600 nuclear warheads signaling the failure of limiting nuclear weapons and the danger of Chinese nuclear threat as an eminent security concern (Hawkins, 2025). The reports further point to the assertive one party rule and China's territorial ambitions as potent aspects of breach. On the other hand, according to SIPRI's research, currently Russia has 5459 warheads and the U.S. has 5177 warheads holding 90% of the world's nuclear stockpile (Kristensen & Korda, 2021). With Russia embroiled in a conflict with Ukraine and the surmounting increase in nuclear arsenal of the United States, the pronouncement of nuclear threat arising from China needs careful consideration.

Deliberating on China's strategic understanding of nuclear weapons, its nuclear policy and its participation in international non-proliferation and arms control regimes, this article elucidates on the understanding of a distinct Chinese strategy of utility, advancement and effectiveness of nuclear power in international order. Drawing upon the threat perception theory in international relations (Jervis, 1976; Walt, 1985), this article argues that the projection of an eminent Chinese nuclear threat from the U.S. and its western allies lacks the cognitive understanding of distinct nuclear security strategy and vision of an East Asian power resulting in misperceived and narrowly informed narrative of Chinese threat. Due diligence in understanding distinct visions and needs beyond dominant western perceptions effectively limits misperceptions and conflictual attitude and enhances the scope of comprehending diverse ideas of security, strategic vision amidst a fractious, uncertain and conflict ridden international order.

China and International Non-Proliferation and Arms Control Regimes:

China's first nuclear test in October, 1964 stated that it was justified as an act of self defense against nuclear blackmail and threat by American imperialism and pledged its No First Use (NFU) policy at the same time (Lewis & Litai, 1988). However, development of larger nuclear arsenal was not ardently sought as they were not considered essentially strategic or relevant to Chinese security.

Nuclear developments in the region and conventional incidents from Belgrade bombing, India-China border stand-off, U.S. withdrawal from ABM treaty and the present violent international scenario has enforced a change in China's perception of its security environment. The change in threat perception has not changed the role of nuclear weapons in its security policy but has augmented its initiative to accelerate its nuclear build up and modernisation. According to some Chinese scholars the "threat of American imperialism" is being morphed as military threat emanating from regions abroad but the core principle remains self- defense, opposing nuclear coercion and deterrence (Li, 2023). China has strongly upheld its negative security assurance and has abstained from projecting nuclear threats or signals in any of its conflicts. It has been very vocal about its reservations to the use or threat of nuclear weapons during the Ukraine crisis and other ongoing conflicts in the world.

China's recognition as one of the five officially declared nuclear-weapon states has given it considerable influence in global affairs. Yet, it was only in the 1980s that the Chinese leadership began to appreciate the importance of engaging with nuclear non-proliferation regimes. At a practical level, its decisions to export or restrict nuclear materials have a direct impact on nuclear and military developments, especially since only a few nations possess the capability to supply nuclear technology. At a symbolic level, the effectiveness of international efforts to curb the spread of nuclear weapons depends on broad participation, and China's stance on these regimes strongly affects their legitimacy. Furthermore, China's involvement in non-proliferation initiatives symbolises its acceptance as a responsible member of the international community.

However, since adopting its open-door policy in the early 1980s, China has faced persistent accusations of irresponsibly spreading nuclear technology, a charge that has troubled its government and complicated its efforts to gain full recognition and trust within the global community. Initially China was hesitant to be a member of the NPT as the then Chinese leader Mao Zedong condemned the idea that nuclear proliferation could be a prominent security concern (Gill & Medeiros, 2000). China also asserted the treaty to be discriminatory creating different standards for nuclear have's and nuclear have nots. The sweeping economic reforms initiated under Deng Xiaoping allowed China to reconsider many of its earlier policy assumptions. In the aftermath of the Tiananmen incident, Beijing sought common ground with major powers—particularly the United States. In August 1991, Premier Li Peng declared that China had agreed "in principle" to sign the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). This move

did not represent a major policy shift; rather, joining the NPT offered China the prospect of gaining greater access to advanced technologies. Membership in the treaty also served as a form of international endorsement, giving China a symbolic “seal of approval” for responsible behaviour in global nuclear governance (Gill & Medeiros, 2000).

Despite initially rejecting the Partial Test Ban Treaty (PTBT) and expressing doubts that halting nuclear tests alone would achieve complete disarmament, China eventually showed willingness to sign the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) (Zou, 1998). Beijing linked this commitment to its longstanding call for all nuclear-armed states to adopt a no-first-use pledge, often suggesting that such an assurance was a necessary condition for joining the CTBT. However, by October 1993, China announced that it would comply with the provisions of the CTBT once the treaty was finalised and entered into force. (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1994).

China’s decision to accept IAEA safeguards served as an early indication of Beijing’s pragmatic shift in order to gain recognition as a responsible member of the global nuclear community—particularly given its traditional sensitivity toward foreign inspections (Frieman, 1996). This ushered, “Beijing to pursue civilian nuclear cooperation with countries such as Argentina, Belgium, Brazil, Britain, France, Pakistan, and the United States—sometimes as a buyer of nuclear technology and, in other cases, as a supplier” (Frieman, 1996).

China’s Stance on Nuclear Proliferation and Disarmament:

Before 1960s, China largely refrained from engaging in discussions on nuclear proliferation. However, once it began to voice its stance, Beijing adopted a firm, ideologically grounded position that supported the spread of nuclear capabilities to other Communist countries beyond the Soviet Union—and potentially even to certain non-Communist states. From that point up to its first nuclear test in 1964, China consistently upheld this pro-proliferation viewpoint.

With regard to preventing nuclear proliferation, the Chinese Government has refrained from reiterating the arguments of the U.S. imperialists and an analysis based on class is necessary. The impact of nuclear weapons on peace depends on which nations possess them. When in possession of imperialist states, they threaten global stability; but when held by socialist countries, they are viewed as instruments that can safeguard peace. Therefore, it is

incorrect to claim universally that the risk of nuclear war rises simply because more countries acquire nuclear capabilities—a view that reflected China’s increasingly nuanced reasoning on the issue (Zou, 1998; Lewis & Litai, 1988; Zhang, 1999). A somewhat related Chinese argument of the pre-detonation period dealt with the danger of blackmail carried out by the United States against the Communist countries. The problem here was not to deter an outright attack but rather to reduce the ability of the enemy to get its way by making nuclear threats and military demonstrations (Zou, 1998). Finally, the Chinese claimed that the spread of nuclear weapons to a large number of Communist countries would increase the prospects for worldwide nuclear disarmament.

China has consistently argued that a crucial step towards nuclear disarmament is to end the monopoly of the nuclear club. Leading to the Chinese contention that expanding the possession of nuclear weapons to as many states as possible could actually enhance the prospect for their global prohibition and eventual elimination (Mukherjee, 2022).

Post Denotation Period:

Between China’s first nuclear test in October 1964 and its second detonation in May 1965, the most notable shift in Beijing’s stance on nuclear proliferation was a marked tendency to downplay or sidestep the issue entirely. This did not indicate a sudden adoption of anti-proliferation arguments. Rather, following the 1964 test, China sought to project an image of restraint and reasonableness. Beijing denied any claims that acquiring of a minimal nuclear capability has given them any new military prowess or special privileges. Instead, it emphasised the limited utility of nuclear weapons and remained largely silent on any potential impact on the military balance in the Far East. Simultaneously, the Chinese intensified their advocacy for the complete prohibition and destruction of nuclear weapons globally.

In line with these developments, China also clarified its doctrine that its nuclear weapons were intended solely for defensive purposes and would be used only under the most extreme provocation and with utmost caution. Beijing have repeatedly and solemnly declared, “China will never at any time and under any circumstances be the first to use nuclear weapons”, and they have invited the other nuclear powers to join them in a “no first use” agreement (Waltz, 1981; Lewis & Litai, 1988).

China's Nuclear Strategy: Self-Help to Security Interdependence:

Over recent decades, there has been growing recognition in China regarding the diplomatic and security value of multilateral arms control arrangements (Gill & Medeiros, 2000). All the while modernising its nuclear arsenal and from working to limit external constraints on its nuclear development and deployment.

Although China has become more active in arms control, its security thinking continues to emphasise sovereignty, self-reliance, and balance-of-power logic (Shambaugh, 1996). It is rooted in the belief of strategic limitations imposed by western powers, particularly the United States that seeks to contain China's rise by hindering its economic, political, and military progress. This deep-seated suspicion influences how Beijing approaches international negotiations, including those on arms control. Beijing's insistence on equal footing in security negotiations reflects historical sensitivities rooted in its experience of the "century of humiliation" (Shambaugh, 1996).

China retains its stress on the principal of self-reliance in securing its national interests. However, there is an increased recognition in China that multilateral agreements aimed to reduce mutual threats can complement the self-help strategies. While enhancing China's security, diplomatically it can be useful in deflecting international criticism of China's nuclear weapons policies (Zhenyuan, 1994). The exposure of Chinese nuclear scientists, defense and security strategists and analysts to western concepts and ideas of arms control has led to the nascent idea of "security interdependence" (Zhenyuan, 1994). Additionally, China's growing integration into the global economy and participation in international political and economic institutions have encouraged a broader understanding that international arms control mechanisms can help address some of its security challenges.

While the notion of security interdependence has gained traction, Chinese strategists still approach it cautiously, reflecting the endurance of realist assumptions (Zhenyuan, 1994). This would involve recognising that other countries might perceive China's expanding military capabilities and activities as a potential threat and respond defensively. Acceptance of this action–reaction dynamic could lead Beijing to reconsider or limit certain military initiatives in order to enhance mutual trust, and strengthen shared security (Guo, 1994).

Why the Concern for Chinese Nuclear Threat?

The heightened concern for China's nuclear promiscuousness, especially raised by the United States and certain western powers revolves around two aspects, proliferation of nuclear resources and technology to other states aiding their nuclear program and escalation of China's modern nuclear arsenal.

The U.S. accusations of Chinese "irresponsibleness" can be traced back to the 1984-85 congressional debate about a U.S.-China nuclear co-operation agreement. Senator Alan Cranston alleged that the China had been selling nuclear technology to "outlaw nations" including Argentina, Brazil, Pakistan etc. (Cranston, 2021). Allegations of continued nuclear relationship with Algeria and Pakistan came at the time of heightened concern over Iran's effort to acquire nuclear weapons. China conditioned its nuclear sale to Iran contingent on their application to suffice the requirements of IAEA safeguards. Iran being a signatory of NPT the U.S. could not make a legal claim that Chinese transfers were in violation of international law. Further, under growing international pressure, China pledged in 1993 to report all of its nuclear trade activities to the IAEA. Following the allegations of selling ring magnets to Pakistan in 1995, China joined the Zangger committee in October 1997, to steer clear of any uncertainty as to what constitutes a nuclear sale because China will be forswearing sales of all equipment on the Zangger list.

China has been steadily modernising its nuclear arsenal corroborating with its strategic notion of self help and the security conditions in the international order. As the nuclear warheads of the U.S. and Russia grew in leaps and bounds with no major effort to minimise the production or towards nuclear disarmament and the deteriorating relations with the U.S. has further convinced the Chinese administration to develop adequate deterrence. By late 1990s China developed long range SLBM's to improve the response time and also MIRV's aimed at developing smaller, accurate and powerful warheads. The growth had been limited and slow given the speed with which China emerged as one of the formidable major powers.

However, since 2023 there has been rapid advancement in China's nuclear arsenal and its delivery systems. The latest SIPRI data of 2024-25 shows that China's arsenal saw a 20 per cent increase year on year in its nuclear stockpile from 500 to 600 nuclear warheads in 2024-2025 (SIPRI Year Book, 2024). The modern arsenal includes new fast breeder reactors called the CFR-600, Dual Use Air Launched Ballistic Missiles (ALBM) among others. Despite such

advancement the 2023 defense report of China reconfirms its NFU policy and their move towards a Launch on Warning (LoW) posture as compatible with the no first use pledge.

There has been a growing concern in the U.S. and in some sections of the international community regarding China initiating a nuclear arms race and a future threat of nuclear escalation in conflict. The Pentagon reports of 2024 states that China can have 1000 operational nuclear warheads by 2030 and can probably consider nuclear first use if a conventional military defeat in Taiwan pose a security threat to its regime (U.S. Department of Defense, 2024, p. 101). Prominent U.S. think tanks and experts have assumed that nuclear escalation will take place inadvertently in case of conflict in Taiwan (Colby, 2014; Weaver, 2023). In addition, China has vehemently opposed a tripartite nuclear arms control agreement with the U.S. and Russia and has often refused to engage in bilateral talks or other mechanisms with U.S. regarding nuclear arms control spearheading further misconceptions around China's arms build-up.

In the U.S. it is an accepted narrative across government and non-government structures that China aims to enter into a nuclear arms race to match its capabilities with U.S. and pressurise it, while according to Chinese official statements and Chinese experts its advancement is related to ensure the protection of its arsenal and is commensurate with emboldening its second strike posture in face of huge nuclear arsenal possessed by the U.S. (Niu, 2025, p. 82).

Threat Perception and the Probability of a Chinese Nuclear Threat:

Amidst a plethora of such allegations and suspicions, an economically robust and assertive China with distinct strategic culture and one party government has contributed to the whole notion of "China threat". The United States and its western allies have been particularly worried that China might be a considerable threat, with its economic strength it will go on building new arsenals, the tactical relation with North Korea, its sovereign claims over South China sea and Taiwan all contribute to a security nightmare. But why hasn't China done something stark to prove these assumptions right since its acquisition of nuclear weapons in 1964.

The limited understanding of Chinese nuclear strategy and the widespread propaganda of quantitative comparison of nuclear arsenals is essentially inadequate to delineate a nuclear

threat. Unlike the American or western concept of power or security measured against nuclear stockpile, China has consistently undermined the utility of nuclear weapons as only strategic and not tactical with limited or no use in conventional war scenarios. Its “lean and effective” nuclear deterrent has been always directed towards self-help and deterrence initially against American Imperialism and later against overseas nuclear coercion (Cunningham & Fravel, 2019). As per the opinion of Chinese experts’ nuclear weapons have strategic roles and there is almost no differentiation tactical and strategic nuclear weapons (Li, 2023). Its recent advancements are also aimed at deterrence and retaliation in case of nuclear first strike, Beijing’s nuclear strategy has been one of “assured retaliation” (Brown, 2021).

Since its first nuclear test in 1964 China has ascribed to “No First Use” policy and that has remained the stance of the Chinese government thereafter. According to SIPRI data quantitatively Russia and the U.S.A. have threefold of what China has in terms of nuclear warheads (SIPRI Year Book, 2024). Both have declined in accepting any kind of NFU policy while the U.S. has failed to ratify the CTBT and purposefully withdrew from the ABM treaty. China’s nuclear retaliatory capabilities are threatened by consolidated U.S. investment in its missile defense, target indicators in the space and anti-submarine technology (Niu, 2025, p. 78). These can potentially influence China’s decision to accelerate its nuclear build up to have a believable second strike capability and a strong system of strategic deterrence. Despite these there is a growing consensus that China is initiating a nuclear arms race to become a nuclear peer to the U.S. by 2030. Even if one accepts the U.S. Defense Department’s assumption of China acquiring 1000 nuclear warheads by 2030 it will still be unable to disarm the U.S. nuclear arsenal. What then informs such aggravated assumptions regarding the imminent threat from China’s nuclear advancements? The concept of threat perception in international relations can provide a comprehensible understanding in this regard.

Threat perception lies at the core of the understanding of war, deterrence and alliances in international politics. It has to be understood in terms of intention as a source of threat that is independent of military capabilities or greater power resources. Threat perception is crucially linked with belief system, ideology and lack of understanding or acknowledgement of the other. Building on the Neo realist theory, Stephen M. Walt added a critical element of perception to explain why states align with some power and not with others (Walt, 1985). In his balance of threat theory Walt argues that states do not balance against stronger power rather against states that they perceive to be threatful or aggressive (Walt, 1985). Robert Jervis (1976) explored

threat perception and misperception weighing carefully between what leaders or states perceive as threatening irrespective of potential power or military capabilities. He argued that misperception of other actors heavily influences threat perception leading to potentially conflictual or hostile outcomes in international politics.

Utilising Jervis's spiral model, it can be observed that the failure to understand the Chinese nuclear strategy based on deterrence, the United States due to cognitive biases and pre-structured conceptions informs its threat perception of a Chinese nuclear threat that spirals into dissemination of such information and creates an atmosphere of tension and hostility further influencing security dilemma among others. The intent to define Chinese nuclear strategy through the western or U.S. centric understanding of nuclear weapons as a tactical power resource aimed at striking capability leads to spiral of escalating insecurity, misjudgment of situations and spreading of misperceptions. Charles Glaser's (1997) has argued that Jervis's spiral model has clubbed different kinds of spirals into one model making it analytically ambiguous. Atuned to Glaser's classification of different spirals, this article derives from perception spiral model to underline that U.S. conception regarding Chinese nuclear threat is based more on expansionist and power dynamics aspects rather than security seeking responses (Glaser, 1997). Security dilemma is less potent cause with regard to United States' reaction to China and the spiral can be a cause for expansionism or revisionist tendencies embedded in U.S. strategic thinking (Tang, 2009).

Gerald Segal asserts that China remains militarily relevant mostly because it is not a status quo power, but it not beyond containment (Segal, 1999). He further adds, China's ability to cause disruption primarily stems from its capacity to oppose or obstruct western interests. While countries like France, Britain export more arms than China, their actions do not pose comparable strategic problems (Segal, 1999). Additionally, China's arms export strategy has crucial geo-political motives beyond the commercial aim. China is intentionally targeting client states that are often considered undeserving by western arms export regimes thereby creating a niche base for expending its influence and strategic leverage that can challenge western interests (Reshetnikova, 2023).

Given the perception is disseminated by the preponderant power of the present international order lends it with further vitality turning it into a believable narrative or global perception. At the core of this lies the inability or rigidity of the international norms and structures to accommodate or acknowledge ideas or norms beyond western notions or

conceptions. The Chinese nuclear strategy presents a distinct strategy as an East Asian power that necessarily does not ascribe to tactical valuation of nuclear weapons, adheres to a declared NFU policy and modernises its arsenal for deterrence in face of escalating nuclear stockpile of Russian and the United States and conflictual international situations.

It has to be further understood that China has long term investments to promote itself as a responsible global power within a fractious international order. China will go a long distance to avoid international isolation or a constructed propaganda of being an irresponsible assertive power. Considering the diverse verification regimes that the Chinese government has complied extensively and abiding by the norms of international accords signals its willingness to be part of the international regimes despite the presumption of threat arising from it.

China's willingness to comply with or support arms control and nonproliferation agreements largely depends on how universally acceptable those regimes are. The broader the acceptability, the greater China's receptiveness; conversely, limited or exclusive arrangements draw less support. Global multilateral frameworks are favoured by China over smaller, regional or limited multilateral ones; yet it considers multilateral agreements preferable to restrictions imposed unilaterally by the United States.

The existing regimes however significant from global perspective are marginally or tangentially relevant to Chinese security concerns. Chinese officials often highlight several key concerns that current frameworks fail to address: the lack of a no-first-use agreement among the five recognised nuclear powers—which would allow China to claim the moral high ground; the absence of international limits on ballistic missile defense systems; the continued U.S. supply of advanced weaponry to Taiwan; and the possibility of Japan's remilitarisation (Pan, 2018).

From Beijing's perspective, the existing regimes limitedly serve China's security interest. United States and other western powers often highlight how China gains from stability in Korean Peninsula, proliferation control over countries lacking complete nuclear safeguards. However, Chinese policymakers regard these as serving only their secondary strategic interests, not their core national security concerns.

China is reluctant to endorse confrontational or coercive non-proliferation measures leading to regime change. It pursues nuanced engaging approaches that preserves a regime's

survival that it supports while securing its strategic interests and relationships. China's balancing approach towards North Korean nuclear issue exhibits how China is trying to secure non-proliferation and containment through enhanced economic exchanges while retaining historical ties (Duchâtel & Schell, 2013).

Conclusion:

China's core security strategy remains rooted in self-reliance, deterrence and traditional balance of power logic. Despite Beijing's engagement in selective forms of security cooperation like limited security interdependence, it primarily relies on unilateral self-help measures to strengthen its national defense (Guo, 1994). While modernising its military and nuclear capabilities, China has shown limited recognition that such actions might heighten insecurity among neighbouring East Asian states. Chinese officials argue that its stated peaceful intentions, declared no-first-use (NFU) policy, and opposition to nuclear dominance should be sufficient to arrest regional concerns about its strategic motives (Wu, 2013).

The heightened propaganda and misinformed exaggeration of China's military and nuclear modernisation as "China threat" is viewed by Chinese leaders, analysts and diplomats as conscious efforts to discredit China's rise and initiate discord in its relations with its neighbours. China's self-help approach is inadequate to support its economic and military modernisation within a stable environment in the long run and the limited security interdependence approach serves as a significant mid-way strategy for Chinese security and foreign policy.

For instance, Chinese analysts acknowledge that self-help measures alone can only deter or defend against potential threats—such as a nuclear-armed Japan—but participation in the NPT helps lower the chances of neighbouring countries developing nuclear weapons that could endanger China. China's arms control experts see agreements like a comprehensive test ban as complimenting their national security goals, as they limit nuclear proliferation, keep the balance with India by halting further advancements, and restrain widening of the technological gap with the United States and Russia (Glaser, 1998).

Understanding of the Chinese nuclear strategy rooted in the improbability and inefficiency of nurturing a large nuclear stockpile which cannot effectively be deployed to address a military or security threat, can potentially impact the realist quantitative idea of

acquiring nuclear weapons. The threat perception which influences the presumption of a Chinese nuclear threat if applied from the Chinese perspective can provide answers to the present nuclear and military modernisation. The refusal of the U.S. and Russia to adopt a NFU policy, the absence of concrete U.S. Russia agreements to make substantial cuts in manufacturing of nuclear weapons, the continued support of U.S. government to Taiwan despite China's reservations coupled with a volatile international security environment are enough markers that can exacerbate China's threat perception and influence it to advance its strategic weapons for required deterrence.

Complete reversal or retreat from its long-standing NFU pledge or deliberate abandonment of international non-proliferation and arms control structures in the near term seems improbable. Beijing has constructively built its image as a responsible nuclear actor through its engagement with multilateral arms control regimes and it benefits from the aligned technological access and sales making it politically and economically costly to reverse. However, rapid force modernisation by other powers, geopolitical stress or crisis can influence Beijing's posture to become more aggressive or assertive. The risk assessment remains low-moderate with may be amendments or added caveats to NFU official doctrine, dispersal or pre-deployment of nuclear forces or lesser transparency (Glaser & Fetter, 2021; Gill & Karasik, 1999; Christensen, 2015; Wu, 2013). Its modernisation must not be equated with policy shift rather to be understood as a recourse to vulnerable strategic encirclement, fear of U.S. Russia nuclear development, U.S. involvement in the region (Christensen, 2015).

Deliberate breach of NFU or the standards of international regimes by China seems unlikely as these remain central to its self-image and consensus building strategies. But tendencies towards amendments to its NFU policy and crisis time ambiguity and restricted transparency are rising.

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