

## Report 47

# Missile Defense and U.S. Policy Options toward Beijing<sup>1</sup>

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## INTRODUCTION

In the Rose Garden of the White House on December 13, 2001 President Bush made it official, in six months hence—the 13<sup>th</sup> of June 2002—the United States would officially withdraw from the ABM Treaty. This relatively low-key announcement surprised no one who had been following the foreign policy and public diplomacy of the Administration since early spring of 2001. By the time President Bush made his announcement it was a forgone conclusion that the United States would free itself from the impediments of the ABM Treaty in order to pursue a defense against ballistic missiles that would provide coverage for the entire 50 states.

The ABM Treaty is perceived (correctly in my view) by administration officials as an impediment to the development, testing and fielding of any national system, even one limited in capability in terms of the numbers of ICBM's it could engage. Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz captured this view clearly when he testified before the Senate Armed Services Committee that 10 years after the first Americans were killed by a ballistic missile the country is no better prepared to

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<sup>1</sup> Not for citation without permission of the author. This represents the personal views of the author only, not those of CNA Corporation

meet the threat of ballistic missiles than it was decade ago and that “our people and our territories are defenseless.... because of the ABM Treaty.”<sup>2</sup>

Deciding to withdraw also allowed the White House to cut the Gordian knot of trying to reconcile adherence to the law of the land—the National Missile Defense Act of 1999—which requires the United States to deploy a national Missile defense as soon as technologically possible, with a treaty that forbade that very action.

What is interesting is how muted the reaction from Russia and China has been. While Russia is on record as considering this action as a “mistake” it generated less harsh language from Moscow than we have heard about the anti-Russian judging at the Salt Lake City Winter Olympics. Beijing has been equally circumspect in their reaction; although it is not clear what they could realistically have done beyond rhetoric since they were not party to the treaty. But the point, as former Secretary of Defense Schlesinger wrote in the February 20<sup>th</sup> editorial page of the Washington Post is that “ It is astonishing that there has been so little commentary on the prospective end of the ABM Treaty, which until recently was heralded as the cornerstone of strategic stability.”

The point of raising the Schlesinger observation is not to reopen the debate regarding the ABM Treaty, but to highlight how little discussion and public debate has taken place on the issue of what the post-ABM treaty strategic environment will be, especially with China. In the case of Russia, dialogue is underway to define a new “legally binding” strategic relationship. This dialogue is taking place within the context of an administration worldview that opines that the ABM Treaty an unnecessary understanding between Moscow and Washington because neither country saw the other as an enemy. It also takes place in an environment of rough strategic parity in which the ability to defeat a full-scale Russian nuclear attack was simply too difficult a defensive challenge.<sup>3</sup>

But, neither of these two shaping aspects—balanced nuclear capabilities and the apparently benign conceptualization of long term intentions toward one another—of dialogue with Moscow pertains to China. Nor does any enthusiasm exist in Beijing for strategic dialogue; although it is hard to see how

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<sup>2</sup> Testimony before the Senate Armed Services Committee by Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz, July 12, 2001. [www.defenselink.mil/speeches](http://www.defenselink.mil/speeches).

<sup>3</sup> At this stage even if this administration, or some subsequent administration, wanted to transition from the limited “limited” ballistic missile defense now envisioned to a “dense” all aspect “defense dominance” concept akin to the Reagan-era Star Wars concept against an arsenal as large as the Russians they be unable to do so for many many years because of the limits of technology. The Russians remain worried about this however and will probably press for some legally binding way to keep a “limited” BMD system limited

China can avoid accepting President Bush's offer if they hope to have any opportunity to make their concerns about missile defense known to Washington.

At the same time trying to think through US policy options leading to some sort of strategic relationship with China is hamstrung by uncertainty. Uncertainty over the long term strategic modernization of plans of Beijing, uncertainty whether the US and China could be involved in a war about Taiwan, uncertainty whether the US-China relationship will, over the long run, be "candid, constructive, and cooperative" or something worse, such as competitive or confrontational.<sup>4</sup> And finally, how successful the country will be in actually fielding a national missile defense.

## **IMPACT ON CHINA**

The decision to withdraw from the ABM Treaty was not a surprise, but it was a diplomatic setback for China because, no matter how "limited," *any* US national system would have an impact on China's small strategic retaliatory force.

According to Chinese interlocutors, the only way that China would have been able to maintain a small—though modernized—retaliatory ICBM force of about the size it possesses today (18-20 ICBMs) was if the ABM Treaty survived intact and unmodified. The key for China was no US national system—period. Any compromise that permitted a national system disadvantaged China. Even the very modest system proposed by the Clinton Administration would have had a negative impact.

As a result, Beijing's diplomatic strategy aimed at frustrating US desires to build a national missile defense had a very low chance of success because it was clear, almost from the time of North Korea's Taepo Dong launch that the US was determined—in fact was legislatively required—to field some sort of national defense.

The only way China could have succeeded was for Moscow to continue to say "nyet," and for Washington to be afraid of withdrawing from the Treaty unilaterally. So on balance whether the ABM Treaty was modified or the US totally withdrew really made very little difference to Beijing in terms of overall impact—the *only question for them is the size of any US national system, and the magnitude of*

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<sup>4</sup> Testimony of Secretary of State Colin Powell before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee on February 5, 2002. Federal News Service, Inc.

*what China's response might be.* The Chinese are painfully aware of this, and this, I believe, is why Beijing has been so restrained in their commentary on the December 13<sup>th</sup> announcement.

## CHINA'S LIKELY RESPONSE

Since October 16, 1964, the day China exploded its first atomic bomb; China's declared strategic doctrine has been retaliatory in nature. The official statement made that day continues to guide China's nuclear strategy:

“The Chinese government hereby solemnly declares that China will never at anytime, or under any circumstances be the first to use nuclear weapons.”

This so-called “no-first use” doctrine means that China has adopted a strategy that overtly acknowledges that China will “accept” the first nuclear blow. Its nuclear forces would only be used to retaliate once China was attacked.

This means however, for such a strategy to be credible, at least vis-à-vis the two nuclear superpowers, its retaliatory nuclear force had to be able to survive an overwhelming first strike from either the Soviet Union (now Russia) or the United States. In other words a few, perhaps only one or two, Chinese nuclear systems had to survive the hundreds or even thousands of weapons implied by an overwhelming preeminent strike in order to be able to hit back at Soviet or American cities.

This strategy vis-a-vis the United States was clearly “incredible” between 1964 and 1981 because China did not have the means to deliver a nuclear weapon at intercontinental distances. China's first ICBM, the DF-5, did not enter operational service until 1981. Up to that time Chinese ability to retaliate with nuclear weapons against the United States was limited to shorter-range bombers and missiles aimed at US bases on China's periphery.

It is only over the last twenty years that China's minimum deterrent against the continental United States was credible, provided its ICBM force could survive a potential decapitating US first strike. However, even today ICBM survival seems problematic. As Paul Godwin has written about both the DF-5 ICBM and the shorter range DF-4 IRBM, “neither of these weapons is maintained at high levels of readiness. Their warheads are stored separately from the rocket launchers, and the rockets themselves are

not kept fueled. The process of loading the liquid fuel tanks and installing the warhead can take 2 to 4 hours.”<sup>5</sup>

Furthermore these silo-based weapons are obviously geographically fixed—and hence locatable from space. Because the Chinese do not have space based missile launch detection systems necessary to warn them of a US missile launch, China could not institute a launch on warning posture even if its ICBM’s were fueled and otherwise ready during a crisis.

During the 1980’s Chinese apprehension regarding this vulnerability was undoubtedly mitigated by the relatively close anti-Soviet political relationship between Beijing and Washington. The potential for a Soviet first strike must have seemed much more credible at the time. Against the Soviets then, and the Russians and Indians today, Beijing has more numerous short range ballistic missiles, its intermediate range bomber force, and from mid-decade on, its single SSBN available. This intermediate range “triad” made the likelihood of some retaliatory capability surviving a Soviet first strike much more credible.

During the 1990’s Beijing has had this calculus reverse to its disadvantage. The close Beijing-Moscow “Strategic Partnership” makes the prospect of a Russian first strike remote. Whereas the potential for conflict between China and Washington over Taiwan has, from the perspective of a PLA worst-case planner, worsened. The prospect of a U.S first strike is not nearly as far-fetched as just twelve years ago. Instead of the several hundred weapons that could range Russia, and thus almost guarantee some ability to retaliate, Beijing today has just some 20 odd DF-5A ICBM’s (8100 nautical mile range) capable of reaching the United States.<sup>6</sup>

China’s sensitivity to the vulnerability of its retaliatory capability was almost certainly enhanced as the PLA carefully analyzed the lessons of US military operations since the Gulf War. The combination of real time space-based surveillance, space based navigation systems and very accurate conventional weapons made the possibility of preemption *by conventional weapons* another concern.

As the decade ended, the reality facing Beijing was that its declaratory nuclear doctrine, based on an assured ability to retaliate against the United States, was more rhetorical than real. In an important

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<sup>5</sup> Paul H. Godwin, “China’s Nuclear Forces: An Assessment”, *Current History*, September 1999, pg. 260

<sup>6</sup> *The Bulletin of Atomic Scientists*, May-June 1999 cited in ibid. pg.263.

paper by Bates Gill and James Mulvenon, they conclude the credibility of China's retaliatory capability is more psychological than real in the face of an all out preemptive strike.<sup>7</sup>

Given this assessment it is fair to pose the rhetorical question, "if Beijing's retaliatory capability against the United States is a strategic fiction anyway how does an missile defense system make China's strategic situation any worse?" Why has Beijing invested political capital in an active anti-missile defense policy?

The answer has several aspects. First, from Beijing's perspective there is always the possibility that a few, even one or two, Chinese ICBM's could survive preemption. Even a minimally sized US missile defense would be able to deal with these surviving ICBM's.

Second, and more important, is the worry that a US missile defense system would threaten China's ongoing strategic modernization; a program specifically aimed at eliminating China's vulnerability to a preemptive US first strike. Beijing's efforts have largely focused on its ICBM force, and at this time do not appear to have the goal of complementing its intermediate range triad with an intercontinental triad focused on the US<sup>8</sup>

Preliminary pieces of a US system may be fielded at about the same time these survivability steps are beginning to be fielded in China; raising the specter of trumping them and returning China to today's situation of having more of an asperational than real retaliatory capability. This relates directly to the third reason China opposes US NMD—the issue of "nuclear blackmail."

Nuclear blackmail is a very serious issue from Beijing's perspective. It dates back to the 1950's when the Eisenhower Administration threatened to employ nuclear weapons to end the Korean War and then again during the Taiwan Strait Crisis of 1958. In 1964 when China detonated its first atomic bomb, its public rationale for developing this weapon was to "...oppose the US imperialist policy of nuclear

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<sup>7</sup> Bates Gill and James Mulvenon, "The Chinese Strategic Rocket Forces: Transition to Credible Deterrence", a draft paper presented during a December 1999 conference sponsored by the Library of Congress and the National Intelligence Office for East Asia.

<sup>8</sup> Adding an intercontinental bomber force to the PLAAF seems far-fetched at this point, although sales from Russia cannot be totally discounted; although that would be a violation of Start I. However, if the Start framework is a casualty of the ABM Treaties demise bomber sales cannot be ruled out. While most analysts' credit Beijing with plans to build additional SSBN's, those submarines must be able to elude, and hence survive, United States attack submarines to be considered a survivable leg of China's retaliatory force.

blackmail and threats.... China is developing nuclear weapons for defense and for protecting the Chinese people from US threats to launch a nuclear war.”<sup>9</sup>

These arguments may appear self-serving to Americans, particularly since it has been over 40 years since the last occurrence, but they are encountered frequently enough from Chinese interlocutors that they cannot be easily dismissed.

The issue of nuclear blackmail leads to the fourth and final major reason why Beijing worries about missile defense—Taiwan. An US missile defense would return China to a position of nuclear vulnerability without a retaliatory recourse. Then any attempt by Beijing to use force against Taiwan would permit the US to intervene and threaten to escalate the crisis with impunity. In other words, a replay of the 1958 Taiwan crisis.

Implied in this argument is that as long as China’s nuclear retaliatory capability is credible it possesses a wider range of military options against both Taiwan and the US than they might otherwise consider if the US can trump China’s nuclear response.<sup>10</sup>

With or without a US missile defense system China has a strategic vulnerability issue it is slowly taking steps to correct through a comprehensive strategic modernization. Missile defense did not precipitate that modernization, but any US deployment may have an impact on the quantitative, and perhaps qualitative, scope of strategic modernization. I say “may” because Chinese long term plans and objectives for their ICBM force are not clear.

According to the latest CIA NIE on “The Foreign Missile Developments and the Ballistic Missile Threat Through 2015” the Intelligence Community projects the overall size of the Chinese ballistic missile force deployed against all of the United States as falling between 75-100. In addition China has about 24 shorter range DF-31 and CSS-3 ICBMs that can reach the western United States. So in total, according to the IC, China will have, as a minimum, 100-125 ICBMs that could hit the United States. Was this where China was going before US national missile defense decisions were firm, circa 1999, or is it a goal that Beijing established after the Missile Defense Act of 1999 which removed questions about US national intent? The NIE is silent of this point, probably because the IC does not know.

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<sup>9</sup> Statements of the Government of the Peoples Republic of China in John Lewis and Xue Litai, *China Builds the Bomb*, Stanford University Press, 1988, pps. 241-242.

<sup>10</sup> I am indebted to my colleague at CNA Corporation, Dr. David Finkelstein for highlighting this point in a presentation he delivered during a recent conference on NMD sponsored by the State Department.

This is a very important “guesstimate” because depending upon the capability that the US chooses to field in a limited missile defense system a Chinese arsenal of this size may be adequate to ensure its ability to retaliate. Since most of these Chinese ICBMs would be road-mobile concerns about the ability of the US to destroy them with conventional weapons would also be greatly mitigated. Finally, if by 2015 China is able to have in place space based sensors that can detect US missile launches, Beijing concerns about being disarmed by a “bolt-out-of-the blue” attack would be mitigated because they would have the ability to “launch on warning.”

## **THINKING ABOUT CHINA IN THE CONTEXT OF US MISSILE DEFENSE**

In attempting to discuss US policy options regarding missile defense in particular and a “strategic relationship” in general toward China that make sense, I find it useful to parse the “threat” in the context of whose missiles is Missile Defense intended to defend against.

Clearly, the administration does not intend to make an attempt to defend against a full scale Russian attack, although a ballistic missile defense system would presumably be able to deal with an errant or accidental launch from Russia. (Something that cannot be ignored given the steady decline in the Russian defense budget made available for maintenance, training, and spare parts.)

The President and all senior officials from the Department of State and the Department of Defense have been explicit that whatever missile defense system the United States ultimately fields it will not be “thick” enough to totally “disarm” or neuter Russia’s ability to strike the United States with a ballistic missile. In this sense, the system is said to be “limited” because it will simply not have enough firepower to defeat the many hundreds ballistic missiles The Russian Federation has at its disposal.

Further, the Administration has argued, with good reason in my judgment, that doing away with the ABM Treaty created no reason for Russia to worry because neither country saw the other as an enemy. In other words there was no reason for the United States to attempt to defend itself against Russian missiles because Russia is a friend. In my mind that means it is difficult to envision an issue in which the interests of both parties would be so important yet so diametrically opposed that the two countries could be brought to the point of military conflict. Just as the United States is not building missile defense to defend against British, French, or Israeli missiles because they are friends and allies, there is no reason to defend against Russian missiles.

If the United States is not concerned about defending against Russia, Great Britain, France or Israel, who are the countries that have long range missile programs and either weapons of mass destruction or the desire to obtain WMD? The three rogues—Iran, Iraq and North Korea—now connected as an axis of evil (soon, I predict, to be known “the AOE countries”—along with India, Pakistan and China are the remaining possibilities.

Envisioning India as a state one needs to defend against seems farfetched, at this time; it is difficult to imagine a plausible scenario that would bring New Delhi and Washington to the point of nuclear confrontation. It is also comforting that India’s nuclear strategy is oriented toward deterring China and Pakistan. Such a strategy does not require missiles with a range great enough to reach the United States. Therefore, India has neither the capability nor intent to want to target the United States. However, should India carry out plans to field ballistic missile submarines this would present a capability that US security officials could not ignore, unless by that time the overall relationship US-India relationship grows much closer.

Today Pakistan has neither the capability or intention to threaten the United States with nuclear tipped ballistic missiles. But, the possibility of a radical Islamic government that is virulently anti-US coming to power in Islamabad and building upon the existing Pakistani missile and weapons program is a frighteningly plausible scenario. So while Pakistan is not a rogue, its political fragility means that a limited missile defense capability provides a reassuring hedge.

Finally then, what about China? Where does China fit in? My former colleague at CNA Corporation, Ambassador Linton Brooks, cleverly captured the conceptual difficulty that China presents to US planners and the system architects alike. Should US officials consider China a “small Russia” in missile defense planning, i.e., an ICBM threat that the US does not attempt a “capture” allowing China to continue to be able to hold a number of US population centers at risk; or should they consider China “a large rogue” in terms of its nuclear arsenal, and design America’s missile defenses so they can defeat any Chinese ICBM attack?

Both the Clinton and Bush Administration’s have said, repeatedly, that US Missile Defense is not aimed at China. That means, implicitly, that the US does not see China as an “enemy” to be defended against. This judgment is reinforced by the fact that President Bush spoke to both Moscow *and Beijing* following the decision to walk away from the ABM Treaty about creating a new strategic framework.

The problem is that despite declaratory policy, and even good intentions regarding China, any missile defense system that the US fields that is able to cope with the “AOE countries,” or Pakistan, will inevitably, intended or not, impact on China’s current small ICBM force. This “unintended” strategic impact has consequences because unlike the cases of Great Britain, France, Israel, or India it is possible to imagine an issue that would bring the United States and China into conflict. The issue is of course Taiwan. Both Washington and Beijing recognize this possibility very clearly, witness the military contingency planning going on in both capitals.

Since Beijing has pointedly not eschewed the use of force to achieve unification of the Taiwan and China, and the United States has historically been willing to use force to prevent a militarily imposed unification, the plausibility of conflict remains reasonable until one or both of the parties is willing to change these long held policies—a prospect that does not appear likely in the near term.

So while I don’t believe the United States is being disingenuous when it says missile defense is not “aimed” at Beijing, it is being disingenuous not to acknowledge that even a limited system will have some impact on China and that Taiwan is a potential flashpoint that could lead to a requirement to defend against Chinese ballistic missiles.

Beijing clearly understands this and worries that it could lose the ICBM “option” against the US it currently possesses. Assuming that a missile defense system that works against ICBM’s can eventually be fielded (this is not a foregone conclusion), one issue facing the United States is what impact, if any, building a missile defense against the AOE countries will have on the build-up of Chinese ICBMs.

Further, if the implication in the latest NIE is correct that China will increase the size of its force several-fold over the next dozen years, without regard to whether or not the US fields a defense system, this takes one down a different policy path than if the build-up is assumed to be in response to missile defenses. The unclassified version of the NIE does not address this issue, and since the Chinese have so far been unwilling to reveal their strategic force structure intentions, U.S observers can only speculate.

Parenthetically, I must add, were I a Chinese strategic planner, I would not reveal my long range intentions until I had enough road-mobile systems deployed to assure survivability of a retaliatory

capability. Recent US scholarship has reminded Beijing that in the early 1960's the US debated whether to preemptively "take-out" its nascent nuclear program.<sup>11</sup>

## IMPORTANCE OF TAIWAN

It is difficult to overstate the importance of Taiwan to any calculation of strategic nuclear relations with China. All such calculations must consider the possibility of conflict with China over Taiwan; either because Taiwan rashly declared independence and the US felt compelled to come to the aid of a small democracy and long-time "friend" even if it was Taiwanese rashness that precipitates the crisis, or because China becomes tired of waiting and decides to act based upon its declaratory policy found in the February 2000 White Paper on Taiwan, and attacks Taiwan because they haven't begun dialogue leading to reunification.

While both scenario's are plausible, the likelihood of one or the other actually taking place seems to remote to this author—because China has deterred Taiwan, and we have deterred China. But, not so remote that prudent planning should not be taken to ensure that if the United States becomes embroiled in shooting war with China we have thought through all the implications of engaging in armed conflict with a country armed with nuclear weapons. The United States has never actually had to really do this because, happily, the Cold War with the Soviets never went hot. It is worth remembering that it did go hot with China, but that was before China had nuclear weapons.

One of the implications of conflict over Taiwan must be whether or not the United States should focus on defending against Chinese ballistic missiles. Certainly if conflict broke out with China over Taiwan and the US has already fielded a missile defense system, such a system would be used to the extent of its capability to defend the United States from any Chinese missiles. The issue is not whether we would use any and all defenses if attacked—of course we would. The issue is what capabilities the country should strive to achieve vis-a-vis China's ICBMs within the context of a plausible conflict over Taiwan. How one answers this question will help inform judgments on US interests and US policy choices.

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<sup>11</sup> William Burr and Jeffery T. Richelson, "Whether to Strangle the Baby in the Cradle: The United States and the Chinese Nuclear Program, 1960-1964, International Security, Vol. 25, No. 3 (Winter 2000/2001), pp.54-99.

## US MISSILE DEFENSE PRIORITIES

Before turning to US interests and policy options, an important point of context is provided in an early January 2002 DoD directive from Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld which provides specific guidance as to its missile defense priorities. What is interesting about these priorities is the implied uncertainty over the size and nature of layered missile defense. It is also interesting the defensive “requirement” is very broad—encompassing friends and allies.

- First, to defend the United States, deployed forces, allies, and friends.
- Second, to field a missile defense system that layers defenses to intercept ballistic missiles in all phases of their flight (i.e., boost phase, midcourse flight and terminal) against ballistic missiles of all ranges.
- Third, field specific elements of the overall Ballistic Missile Defense System (BMDS) as soon as practicable. For example, deployment of Patriot PAC-3, as the first line of defense against short-range missiles, is underway.
- Fourth, to develop and test a full range of technologies. Conduct an aggressive testing program and then field the most promising technologies as they become available. This is what has been called by some Secretary Rumsfeld’s “pharmaceutical” approach—look at all possibilities and select the best as opposed to “putting all eggs into one basket” by making an early determination of just one approach.
- To accomplish these priorities the Defense Department is in the process of reorganizing themselves to put one organization in charge. This new entity is to be called the Missile Defense Agency (MDA).

## ASSUMPTIONS THAT SHAPE US POLICY CHOICES

Any discussion of US interests or policy options in the context of missile defense and likely Chinese responses must start by acknowledging the work of Dr. Brad Roberts of the Institute of Defense Analyses in Alexandria, Virginia. He has done the pioneering work on this issue and his August 2001 monograph “China-US Nuclear Relations: What relationship Best Serves US Interests?”<sup>12</sup> addresses many of these issues in greater depth and erudition than I have.

I choose to make the following assumptions as a way to shape policy choices for the United States:

- The United States will invest considerable time and effort in attempting to realize a limited national missile defense system.
- The country will succeed, but the exact architecture and mix of defense systems is still unknown. The system will not be perfect. As Secretary Rumsfeld said before the senate Appropriations Committee on September 5, 2001, “...first let me say that there’s no missile defense system that is going to make us invulnerable...there is no weapons system or defense...that ever been perfect, that’s ever worked 100 percent of the time. That’s just not in the cards.”
- The Chinese will continue their strategic modernization and will, as a minimum build to an ICBM force of between 100-125 no matter what the US does regarding defenses. They will do this because this is a reasonably sized arsenal to deter the United States. For example, the Indians calculate that for them to deter China they must be able to destroy 13 population centers. Because of reliability and other factors they judge a requirement of 6 ICBM’s per target. Adding a 20% war reserve yields around 125 ICBMs. This provides a rough rule of thumb insight into Chinese calculus. If they want to hold around a dozen US cities at risk the numbers fall within the bounds of the Intelligence Community assessment.

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<sup>12</sup> Brad Roberts, “China-US Nuclear Relations: What Relationship Best Serves US Interests?” Institute for Defense Analysis (IDA) Report, August 2001

- The Chinese will grudgingly engage in generalized strategic dialogue with the United States, but they will not be willing to address the specifics of their long range intentions and building goals until a number of road-mobile ICBMs are deployed and operationally ready. (Chinese vagueness will probably drive US interlocutors to distraction.)
- So long as reunification dialogue between Taiwan and the PRC has not commenced the risk of conflict with China is real. US planners have to take this possibility into account. I have no doubt that PRC planners already assume that the US will militarily intervene if necessary.
- The US has decided that the best course of action is to conceptually think about China as a “small Russia,” and not a “big” rogue. But that could change depending on progress on proliferation and a whole host of other issues. The US objective of a normal relationship characterized as “candid, constructive, and cooperative” could become more hostile or confrontational one. Of course, neither capital does not want this, nor do any of America’s friends or allies in Asia. But it cannot be totally ruled out. If this does change then it is likely that the US would expand the focus of missile defenses to include a Chinese threat. Whether this would be possible is difficult to predict given the uncertainty surrounding the ultimate architecture of missile defenses.
- The PRC is serious when they say they will not be subject once again to nuclear blackmail. I take this view with a grain of salt, however, because in truth it ought to be caveated with the phrase, “if we can do anything about it.” Today, China finds it possible to live under the shadow of overwhelming US nuclear superiority (so overwhelming, in fact, that a totally disarming US first strike is conceptually feasible) without adverse impact on its modernization and economic development.
- The U.S has lived under the threat of a Chinese nuclear attack for some time now and that has apparently not affected our policy choices and actions with regard to Taiwan. Our ability to massively retaliate has apparently permitted US policy makers to react to China and Taiwan in an unconstrained fashion.

## POLICY APPROACHES

Because so much of this issue is surrounded by uncertainty it would be foolish to propose lines of policy that go beyond the offer by the United States to engage in dialogue with Beijing on the topic of missile defense and the nuclear strategic relationship between the two countries. Dialogue will inevitably mean shedding light on Beijing's long-term plans for the modernization of its ICBM force. This means becoming transparent in an area in which China has deliberately maintained secrecy and circumspection. But, this will not come quickly, Beijing will proceed to slowly field its more survivable modernized ICBM force, while the US will continue to test and experiment as it moves toward defining the most effective combination of systems that will comprise the "layered" national missile defense system.

How the strategic dialogue with the Russians plays out will have a big impact on the dialogue with Beijing, because one of the central Russian concerns is how can they be assured that a "limited" US missile defense system remains "limited." How Washington and Moscow work this out—if they can work it out at all—will have a major impact on long-range Chinese thinking. If Beijing can be assured that a "verifiable cap" is in place that limits US defensive firepower to a predictable level then they will be able to reach judgments about the adequacy of their retaliatory force. At this point both sides would be able to formally codify the strategic relationship. I hasten to add that this is a long way off.

Finally, it is important to note that there is one more wild card in this deck of uncertainty; North Korea. I have made the point throughout that China has very little leverage with Washington on this issue. It is important to note that Beijing does have one bit of leverage—its proximity to and influence in Pyongyang. Were Beijing to persuade North Korea to **verifiably** forgo the development of nuclear weapons and ICBM's this could have a major impact in Washington particularly if fielding an effective system proves to be very difficult and inordinately expensive.

Without the possibility of a North Korean ICBM threat the political consensus in the United States that favors a limited national system could easily weaken, or totally unravel. Missile defense legislation could be repealed. Absent the North Korean problem, Iraq, and Iran remain the only likely "rogue" threats; and Iraq as we know it today may not be with us long either. In these cases the location and capabilities of a limited national system would probably have to be oriented in such a way that it would be physically impossible to capture all of China's ICBM's.

Let the dialogue begin.